Soccer Today!

Inside: Exclusive Interview with former Socceroo coach Rale Rasic pages 4-5

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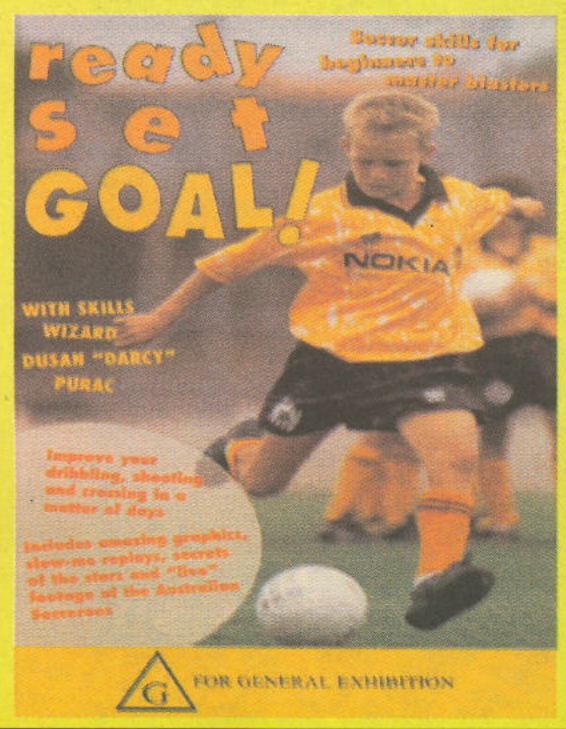
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Matic calls it quits after 14 seasons at Adelaide City

AUSTRALIA'S most successful National League coach Zoran Matic has quit his beloved Adelaide City Force.

Matic, 54, made the announcement to his players on Monday night, ending a liaison that had lasted 14 seasons.

"It was a beautiful ride but all good things have to come to an end," Matic told Adelaide newspaper *The Advertiser.*

"There's no sadness.

"I've never been one to cry about spilt milk.

"I will now go home and tell my wife (Mira) what I have decided."

Matic said his address to the players, behind closed doors, was brief.

"I didn't say much, just one sentence. I told them I was finished and that was that.

"The players didn't say anything because I didn't give them a chance to react.

"But I could see they were surprised."

The three-time NSL championship-winning coach had decided weeks ago he would resign after the final match of the season in four weeks.

But Adelaide's 3-0 capitulation to South Melbourne on Friday night forced him to reconsider his position and to leave immediately.

City's next match is against Marconi in Sydney on Saturday night.

Matic said he did not consider his last season as a failure.

"I got as much as I could out of the players," he said.

"It's the turn of somebody else now.

"The truth is we have been sliding for a few years and we haven't been able to do the J-curve."

Club Chairman Bob D'Ottavi on Monday night said the board would meet next week to discuss the coaching position but a decision on Matic's replacement would not be made until the end of the season.

In the meantime, Matic's assistants, Serge Melta and Carlo Talladira, will look after the side for the remaining four rounds.

Matic coached Adelaide City for 392 matches and he also led Collingwood and Marconi for one season each for a record total of 447 matches in 16 seasons.

He won a record three NSL Championships with City and three NSL Cups (two with City and one with Collingwood).

But Matic leaves his beloved club in their worst position ever.

Three successive 0-3 defeats, unprecedented in its history, and a record low three wins from 20 matches has City staring ominously at the wooden spoon - just two years after a record run of 12 years of finals.

Matic coached City from 1986 until 1995, winning three championships, the first in 1986 as a rookie coach.

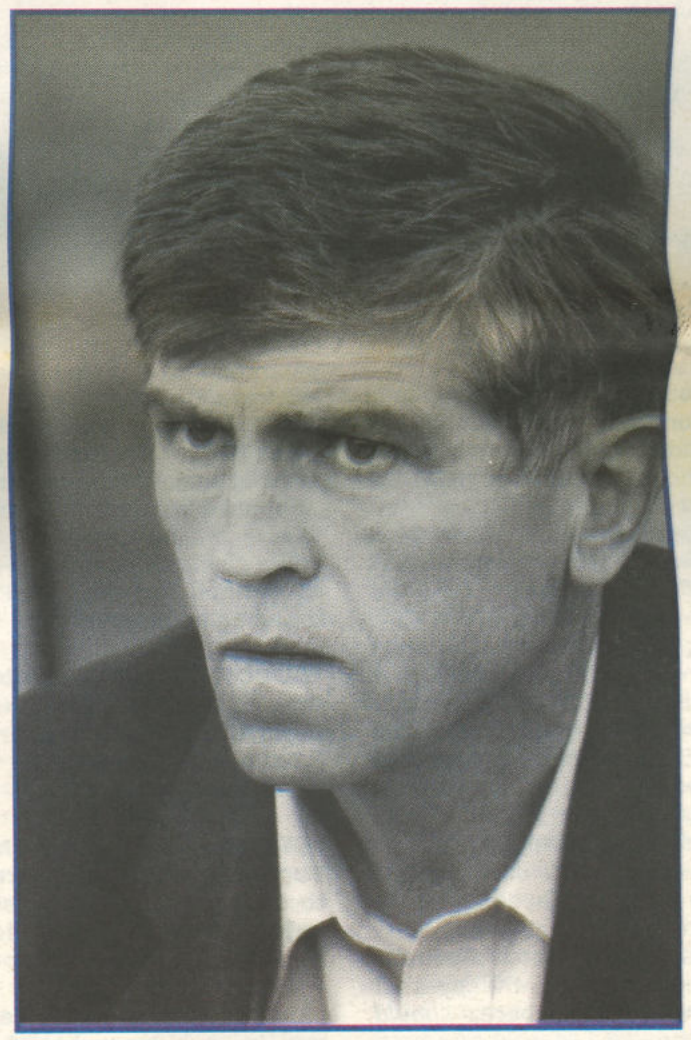
He retired after the 1995 grand final but returned to coaching a year later, first with Collingwood and then Marconi.

He returned to Adelaide in 1998 but the City team he had built, and in his absence developed by coaches John Perin and John Nyskohus, started to break up.

Within two seasons of his return most of the stars had gone.

This season Matic, faced with a shrinking budget, had to rely mainly on a group of teenagers, with support from veterans Carl Veart, Aurelio Vidmar and Ante Kovacevic. D'Ottavi, who also coached City in the early 1980s, last night paid an emotional tribute to Matic.

"Zoran has had a profound effect not only on Adelaide City but also



Australian soccer," he said.

"Adelaide City would not have been as great without him. He has the respect of everyone in the club and, I am certain, of many people around Australia."

D'Ottavi said the change of coaches would almost certainly mean an entirely new approach to the coaching and managing of the team.

"Zoran is a unique individual, as we all know, and it is to be expected the next man who coaches the team will have his own ideas and a different philosophy.

"It is a sad day but we must also see this as a new beginning."

Matic was vague about coaching again.

"I said in 1995 I would never coach again," he said.

So who knows what the future may hold for one of this country's finest mentors?

THE INTERVIEW: RALE RASIC

AUSTRALIAN Soccer has in the past been criticised for not looking after its treasures.

It has been criticised for not showing charity towards those who have in the past elevated the game to the heights it currently enjoys.

What heights, you ask?

Well, the fact that there are more than 100 Aussies plying their wares overseas indicates that Australian soccer is a quality product.

Yet those who have helped mould the game into what it is today are sadly left in a vacuum where they are neither here nor there.

And while some of the men and women who have laid the groundwork just shrug their shoulders and get on with the job, others aren't quite so prepared to let it all go.

One such person who feels he has been mistreated is none other than Rale Rasic, who remains the only coach to have led Australia to the World Cup Finals.

He did this in 1974, when only 16 nations competed at the event in West Germany.

Grouped with host nation West Germany, East Germany and Chile, Rasic's Australians did the green and gold proud.

Sure, they lost to the two German nations, but one must remember that West Germany went on to win the title, while their Eastern Bloc neighbours were the only side to beat them at the tournament.

Australia meanwhile, returned home with a nil-all draw against Chile in a match played in dreadful, waterlogged conditions.

It was also a match Australia could have, and in the eyes of many who were there, *should* have, won.

Rasic lost his job after that campaign and since then, he has remained an outcast, a man who those in the corridors of power have treated with contempt.

He once quipped that his middle name was Nelson, as in Nelson Mandela, "because I've been persecuted for the past 27 years."

That's quite a statement, but the parallel is obvious.

But then again, Rasic himself has never endeared himself to everyone.

And he has never been backwards at coming forwards.

Ego-driven, he has always been his own man, one who planned for success through meticulous groundwork and a liberal dose of discipline.

Speak of Rale Rasic to most people of his generation' and he is described as a larger than life character capable of achieving amazing things.

Speak of him to some of his former players and the split is apparent.

Like former Wallaby rugby union coach and multi-millionaire radio breakfast show celebrity Alan Jones, some loved him, while others weren't too fussed with his methods, as successful as they may have been.

But Rasic is not just a soccer coach.

He's more than that.

He holds two university degrees and he has soccer merchandise patented in the United States and Australia.

And this from a man who suffered the hardship of being raised without a mother and a father.

So how did he get to where he is today?

How did he overcome the grief of losing both parents and being raised as an orphan?

SOCCER TODAY publisher Derek Royal recently spoke to Rale Rasic and discovered an intelligent, ambitious man with plenty to say.

ST: You were an orphan in Yugoslavia yet you were able to overcome such hardship to enjoy success. How did you manage it?

RR: Discipline is what allowed me to achieve what I have achieved. I was raised as an orphan and life was tough. But discipline was what got me to where I wanted to be. While people today say that discipline is a bad thing, I believe it is a good thing. Discipline is about right and wrong. It is about respecting others and being the best you can be. Without discipline we cannot achieve great things.

ST: You are something of a paradox. People generally equate discipline to a regimented lifestyle yet you also encourage individualism in your players and you are big on using your imagination?

One of Rale's favourites - Brazilian ace Pele

RR: Yes, in a soccer sense I am big on individualism and skills while in a general sense I am big on using the imagination to stimulate the mind. I am big on ideas, big ideas and I believe in vision.

I am the kind of person who will wake up at 2 a.m. just to jot down an idea because if you don't write it down then it is lost forever.

ST: You love players who play with what the French would call "Joie de vivre" - those with the individual skills and brilliance to single-handedly win matches. So why is it that you prefer individually brilliant players to players who work well within a team?

RR: Players such as Pele, Maradona, Georgie Best, and Zidane, they are players who can play anywhere, in any country, any league, anywhere in the world. They possess the skills to fit into any team. I have passion for the game and I enjoy individualism which is something that players today don't have enough of. Give me a skilful individual player ahead of someone who is trained to play as part of a team system any day. They are the ones who can win matches. They are the ones who can turn a game when the chips are down. They are also the ones who the crowds come to see, the ones who get the fans off their seats whenever they have the ball. That is why I love the brilliant individual skills of these players. And the funny thing about it is that it's much more difficult to play one-two than to dribble. True. If we don't encourage dribbling at a young age then how can we expect individual brilliance when the chips are down? In England they were writing for 10 years after Argentinian Ricky Villa's performance in an FA Cup Final for Tottenham. And they still adore the likes of Best, Stanley Matthews and Frenchman David Ginola, all these players with super individual skills.

Of the current players in England, Manchester United's Ryan Giggs is the standout but he is an exception to the rule. You cannot ask young players who have learnt pass and run to play this way. Europeans specialise in individual skills, so too do African players and South Americans. It's a shame that we in Australia don't adopt the same principles on how to play.

ST: You have met several important people in your life-time, some from the sports world, others from totally different fields. Which athlete has impressed you the most?

RR: Without a doubt, American basketball star Michael Jordan. He is the ultimate athlete, the ultimate person. He is not only a supreme athlete but he is also a clean-living, intelligent person who is articulate and is at all times impeccably groomed. He is the ultimate professional both inside and outside of the sporting arena.

ST: Are there any others who have impressed?

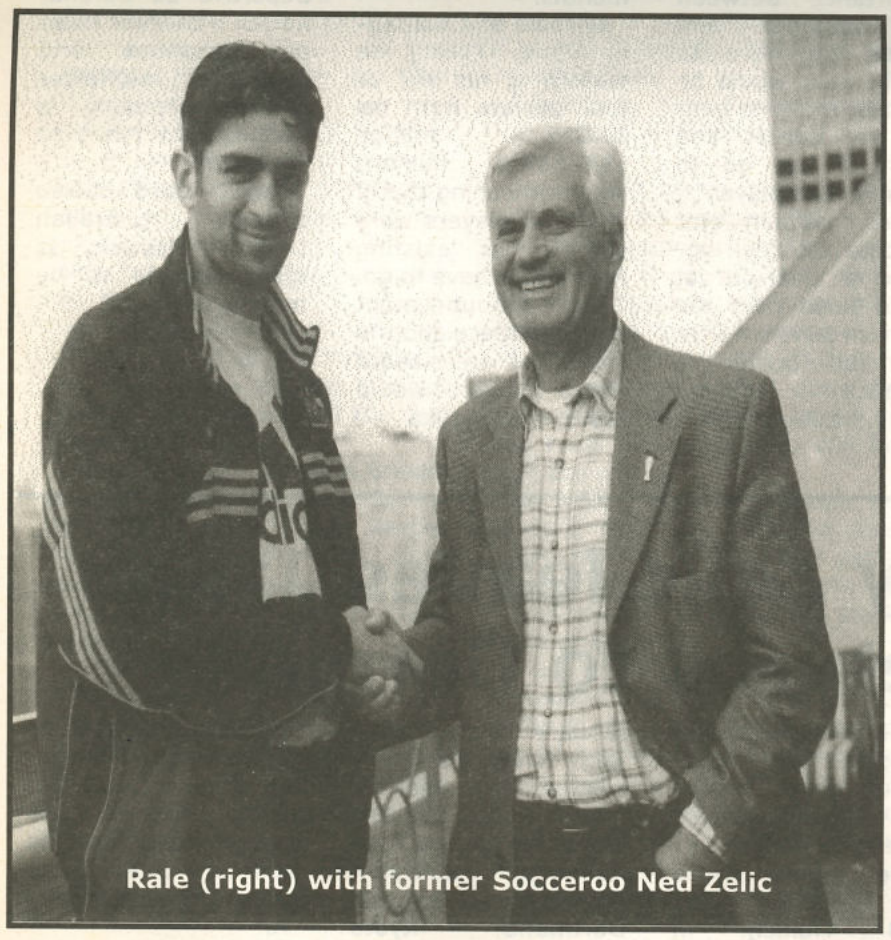
RR: I am impressed by many people of different walks of life. I am impressed with the courage and determination of Formula One drivers. Men like the late Ayrton Senna and German ace Michael Schumacher. I am impressed by their desire. What sets these guys apart from the rest? Formula One is a life-threatening sport where a driver can lose his life if his timing is out by a mere split-second. How do these guys develop such nerves of steel that they can put their lives on the line week-in, week-out without fear. I know that Senna lost his life and that was a tragedy, but to do what these men do is a remarkable challenge.

ST: What are your thoughts on Diego Maradona?

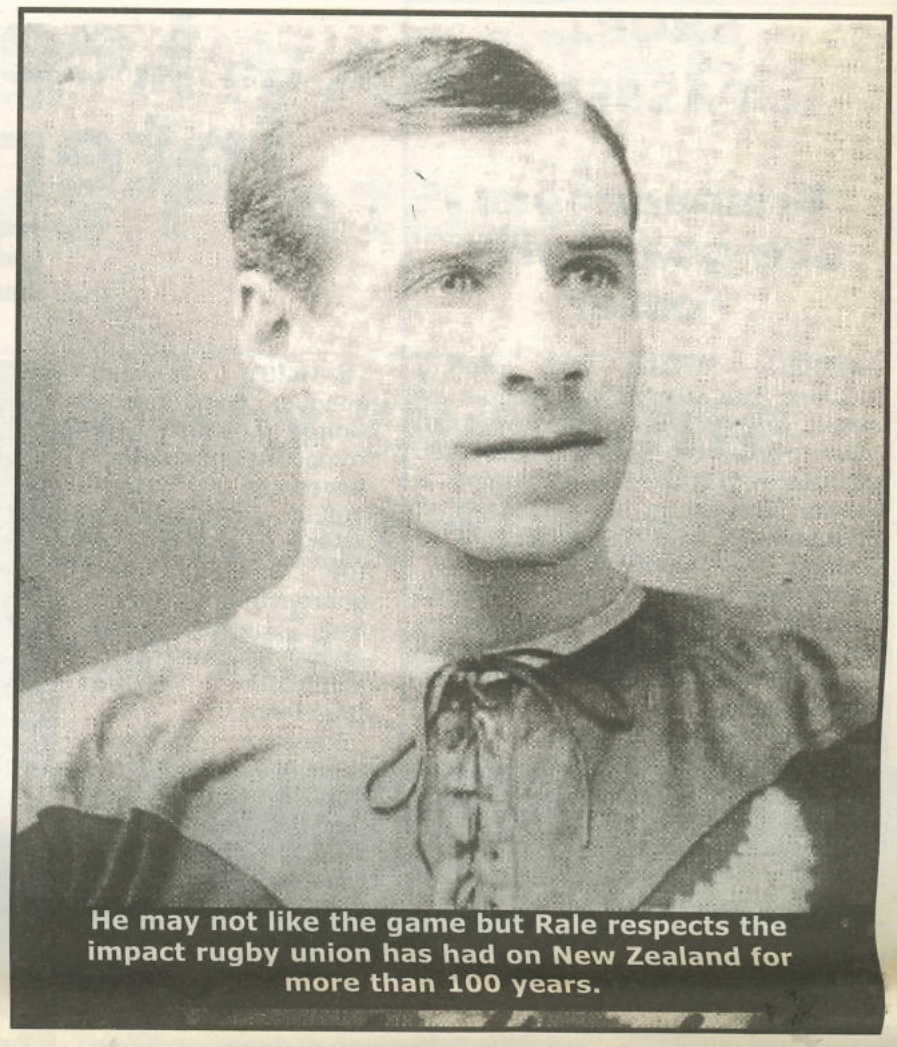
RR: Maradona was a genius. He has been ostracised by many people but he is a man who knows he has made mistakes. And he believes he has paid his dues. Nobody could touch him as a player - he was a genius with a ball at his feet and his story of emerging from unbelievable poverty to the being greatest soccer player ever is an inspiration. It's no surprise that Argentinians are so passionate about him.

ST: Do you have any other sports teams or persons that you have an admiration for?

RR: Yes, many. First of all, the New Zealand All Blacks rugby union team is one because for more than 100 years there has been a certain mystique about



Rale (right) with former Socceroo Ned Zelic



He may not like the game but Rale respects the impact rugby union has had on New Zealand for more than 100 years.

them. And almost every New Zealand boy wants to wear the black jersey with the silver fern emblazoned across the chest. Rugby in New Zealand, a country of only 3.5 million people, is the heartbeat of the nation. When the Men in Black win, the nation rejoices. But when they lose, the nation goes into mourning - they have such a passion for their game. I admire that. I don't particularly like the game, but when you have to respect the impact this game has on an entire nation.

I am also an admirer of Australian rugby union because it is a game played by intelligent men and probably more importantly, run by intelligent men. Because rugby's roots lie in the private schools of New South Wales and Queensland, this sport has more educated people than any other in Australia. Players have in the past gone on to become prominent politicians, doctors, lawyers, judges and leaders of industry.

They have always seen the game as just that - a game - but in true Australian spirit they have always given their all for the Wallaby jersey.

With professionalism now a part of a game that was once reserved for the wealthy and the conservative, it is now attracting top ath*letes who see it as a way of* earning a decent living.

That is why rugby union in Australia has in recent years become so popular.

I also enjoy Aussie Rules, the most popular winter professional sport in the nation.

It's amazing the passion people have for this game. It's a real tribal thing.

Fans are loyal to their clubs and they would never dream of supporting another team.

Imagine, in Australia, more than 80,000 fans turning out to see a club soccer game! I couldn't see that happening but it happens every week in AFL.

The game is also administrated very well and players and coaches are treated with respect.

Like cricket, AFL is a well-read sport and by that I mean that the amount of literature available on the game is phenomenal.

Australian soccer might produce one book every few years or so but there's always something coming out on the AFL that fans will buy without question.

They just love their game so much.

It's a shame more Australians don't love our game - soccer - with as much passion.

SHORT PASSES

Brisbane lose ace goalscorer Foster

BRISBANE Strikers goal scoring machine Paul Foster will be out of action for two weeks due to a knee injury. Foster, the second highest NSL goal scorer (13) this season, strained a medial ligament in his right knee in Brisbane's 1-0 loss to Olympic in Sydney.

Foster was tackled heavily by Steven Olympic's Australia international Laybutt in the 33rd minute in a challenge that earned a red card for the former Striker.

"It hurt when he originally hit and I was worried that I would be out for a long time," Foster said.

But the centre-forward, who has just recovered from an ankle injury, said he was hopeful of making a return in time for the finals.

"At this stage it looks like it's not a major problem and I might, if I'm lucky, only be out for a couple of weeks," he said.

"The most important thing now is to get back so we can have a good run in the finals and have a win."

Strikers coach John Kosmina said he was confident of a finals place despite losing their leading goal scorer and the last match.

"With Fernando (Rech) playing the way he is and Michael Baird in good touch, we've got plenty of options to fill the hole," he said.

"If we can play as well as we did against Olympics last night then I can't see any problem getting through."

Foster will let the injury settle for a few days before seeing the club doctor to determine the full extent of the knee problem.

Schaefer firming as Power assistant coach

Former Marconi head coach Manfred Schaefer is firming as favourite to become Nick Theodorakopoulos' offsider at Parramatta Power.

Schaefer has been spotted at Power training taking notes on various players and is a regular at the club's home games.

Leeds show an interest in Aussie Bresciano

ENGLISH Premier League club Leeds United, which is rumoured to be selling Socceroos Mark Viduka and Harry Kewell at the end of the season, has approached Italian Serie B club Empoli about its Australian midfielder Marco Bresciano.

Empoli sporting director Pino Vitale has confirmed the approach from Leeds for the 22-year-old who made his mark in the Confederations Cup last year and the Olyroos' failed Sydney Olympics campaign the year before.

Bresciano says he would be honoured to play alongside Viduka and Kewell - but he would still go to the club if they weren't there.

"My manager has told me that Leeds are interested," Bresciano, who comes off contract at the end of next season, said on the Leeds website.

"But then again I don't know how serious they are. Would I still go if Viduka and Kewell were sold? Of course I'll still go.

Bresciano would love to play alongside fellow Aussie Harry Kewell at Leeds United

"My next step is very important. Between my manager and myself we have to decide what would be the best move to benefit my career and where I can go to improve as a player."

Leeds chairman Peter Ridsdale last week signalled a clear-out at Elland Road over the northern summer after the club posted a STG13.8 million ($A37.9 million) loss for the last six months.

Ridsdale told manager David O'Leary he wanted a net cut of four players from his STG96 million ($A263.66 million) squad, meaning that if two new players were signed, six existing men would have to go.

The announcement sparked speculation in the British press about which players would leave, with Viduka linked to AS Roma or Deportivo La Coruna, Kewell with Inter Milan or Barcelona and French midfielder Olivier Dacourt a favourite to move to Juventus.

Leeds' third choice keeper, Australian Danny Milosevic, is also reported to be moving on.

AAP

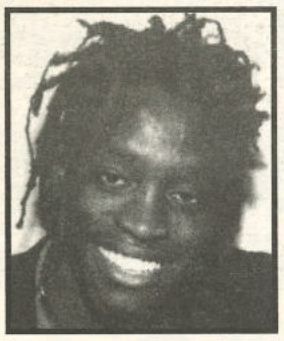
Unhappy Zelic leaves Japan and returns to Germany

AUSTRALIAN defender Ned Zelic's stay in Japan was a short one.

Zelic, who made 33 international appearances for Australia between 1991 and 1997, has left Kyoto Purple Sanga after just one game with the J-League first division side, team officials said earlier this week.

Zelic joined Kyoto from German side 1860 Munich in January but decided to leave after his family elected not to join him in Japan. Zelic has also played for Queens Park Rangers, Eintracht Frankfurt and Borussia Dortmund. Kyoto returned to Japan's top flight for the 2002 season after winning last year's division two championship but is winless after two games this season.

AP



FRANCIS AWARITEFE *writes* Football

Commit the crime, do the time - Branko Culina must take responsibility for his actions

THE touchline line ban that has seen Sydney United coach Branko Culina banished to the grandstand for the rest of the NSL season has been making headlines in the Sydney press.

Culina, a controversial character who is not hesitant in expressing his feelings, has apparently threatened to quit the game following the failure of his appeal to overturn the recent ban.

He admits abusing referee Con Diomis after the Sydney United game at Marconi during which the official added six minutes of injury time.

Marconi equalised in the last minute.

A fuming Culina vented his feelings at the referee after the game and was subsequently charged by Soccer Australia with bringing the game into disrepute.

Now Branko is no stranger to the NSL tribunal.

He was involved in an incident, funnily enough at Marconi stadium in a game against Sydney United in his first stint at the club in December 1996.

I remember this because Branko and I were involved in an altercation as a result of United keeper John Perosh being hurt quite badly because of an on field challenge I was supposed to have made.

Replays subsequently showed that Perosh was injured by United defender Velimir Kupresak.

Branko, along with a number of players, myself included, were charged with bringing the game into disrepute.

We were all found guilty and fined.

On appeal our fines were reduced and all were warned as to our future conduct.

Which bring us to the latest incident.

If Branko feels he is been hard done by, he should take a look at the Premier League in England where coaches are regularly fined for criticising the referee.

In other sports there are many examples of coaches being disciplined for criticising or abusing referees.

In the National Rugby League, there is a mandatory fine of $10,000 dollars for criticising the match referee.

I'd hate to think how much the fine would be for abusing the referee.

Branko just needs to get over it and accept the punishment.

He is a personality in Australian soccer that is not afraid to speak his mind, however, whilst he may have a case that the standard of match officiating in this country is very questionable, that does not make him above the law as far as the rules are concerned. Will he quit the game?

No I don't think so, because he loves it too much, but if he does carry out his threat, the game survive his departure I'm sure.

This now brings me to the standard of officiating.

I am loath to criticise referees because I truly understand what a difficult job they have. I watch a lot of overseas football and the thing that really stands out is that the officials there are reluctant to caution players for relatively minor misdemeanors.

There is also more communica

tion, with referees controlling the game in some instances with a smile on their face.

In the NSL, there also seems to be less communicating between officials and players during a game especially when things are getting heated.

In fact some referees seem to pour fuel on the fire by adopting an aggressive, schoolmasterly tone with players, when what is needed is a cool head not getting caught up in the emotion of the game.

I believe that this is not the fault of the match officials as they are told to interpret the rules strictly and to come down heavily on players who show a bit of emotion during games.

This means that commonsense often goes out of the window and some truly baffling decisions is the result.

In the old days Chris Bambridge and Don Campbell were masters at defusing potentially explosive situations by talking to players during the game, calming them down, and when needed coming down hard on players who persistently infringed. What is needed is a change of direction, where referees are allowed to use their personality and not their cards to control a game.

Gerry Connolly is one of the recent refs who adopted this style, which I know is very popular with players because you know he will let the game flow.

He is popular with players as a result, but not with the hierarchy.

Kewell determined to silence the critics ... including Leeds manager O'Leary

SOCCEROO Harry Kewell says he's out to prove a few people wrong after being targeted by the media and manager David O'Leary for Leeds United's form slump this season.

Leeds has crashed out of the UEFA Cup, the FA Cup and the premiership running and looks unlikely to qualify for next season's lucrative Champions League.

Last week chairman Peter Ridsdale told O'Leary to sell four players over summer after the club announced a STG14 million ($A38.45 million) loss over six months.

And O'Leary said while there had been multi-million pound offers for Kewell's Australian teammate Mark Viduka, captain Rio Ferdinand and Frenchman Olivier Dacoourt, not a single bid had come in for Kewell.

But Kewell said the problem ran deeper than one player's performance.

"I admit that I have not been playing brilliantly and I would like to give one simple reason why, but it is never that easy and you have to look at the way a whole team is performing," he wrote in British newspaper *The Times.*

"The manager has had a bit of a go at me, perhaps hoping for a response, but most of my motivation comes from within.

"All true sportsmen should be able to get themselves out of the bad times by digging deep in themselves and I have got the hunger that will get me through."

Kewell said it was not easy being a winger because it was the sort of position where people were always looking for a match-winning performance.

But he said he would keep persevering.

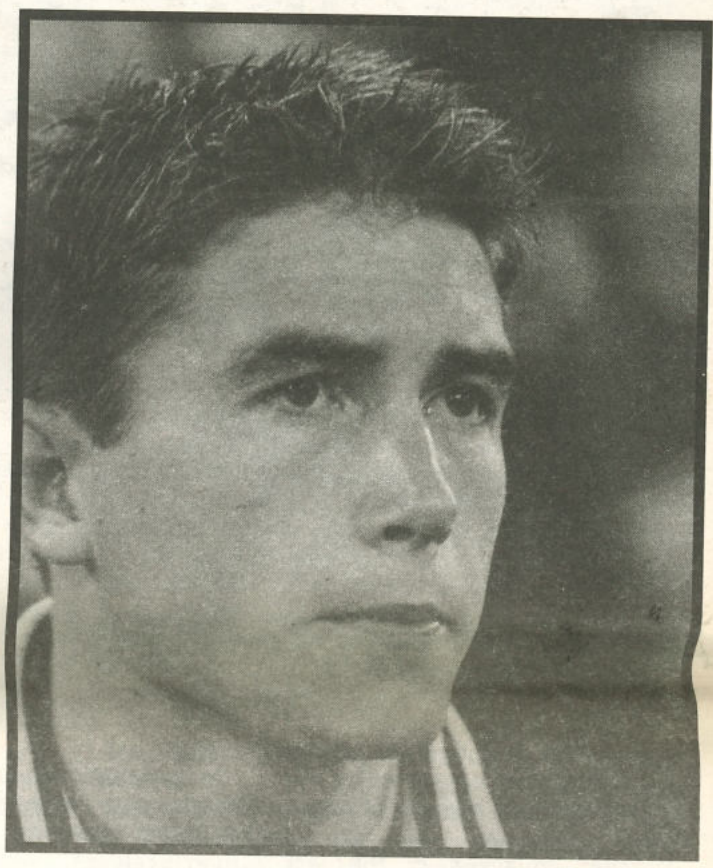
"There has been lots of speculation about a summer clearout at Elland Road," he said.

"Every time I pick up a newspaper, I seem to be at the top of the list, for sale to Italy or Spain. But the manager has always said they have never had a bid for me, so I am not sure if that can be right."

All the players could do was concentrate on overhauling Newcastle for fourth spot and thereby qualifying for Europe next season, he said.

"We have a duty to ourselves to finish as high as we can and, in the meantime, I would like to prove a few people wrong," he said.

AAP



Matildas squad named for visit to France

FIVE changes have been made to the Australian women's soccer side for the assault on next month's international tournament in France.

Goalkeeper Sue Read makes make her debut while Amy Wilson, Bridgette Starr, Amy Taylor and Natalie Thomas received a recall in the only changes to the Matildas side which swept South Korea to win the Australia Cup in January.

The 18-strong team will assemble for a training camp at the Australian Institute of Sport on March 17 then depart for the tournament on March 29.

The tournament - which also features France, Japan and Canada - kicks off on April 3.

Wilson and Starr last played at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, Taylor appeared for the Matildas in China in August 2000 and Thomas chimed into the 1999 Australia Cup campaign.

Claire Nichols and Taryn Rockall are sidelined through knee injuries, while Traci Bartlett and Cheryl Salisbury are unavailable.

Also unavailable are Dianne Alagich and Alicia Ferguson who are recovering from knee reconstructions.

"We have a depleted squad, especially defensively, but that has provided an opportunity for other players to be selected and further their development as international players," said new national coach Adrian Santrac.

"However we will approach this in the same way we approach any tournament, by treating the opposition with the respect they deserve but with the aim of attempting to win the tournament."

AUSTRALIA squad: Sharon Black, Rhian Davies, Alison Forman, Heather Garriock, Kelly Golebiowski, Cassandra Kell, April Mann, Kate McShea, Zoe Nolan, Joanne Peters, Sue Read, Bridgette Starr, Anissa Tann, Amy Taylor, Natalie Thomas, Gill Thomson, Sacha Wainwright, Amy Wilson. Standby players: Pam Grant, Peita-Claire Hepperlin, Olivia Hohnke, Tal Karp.

AAP

THE WORLD OF WOMEN'S SOCCER

with Matildas star Anissa Tann-Darby

Sapphires bridesmaids AGAIN!

Anissa Tann-Darby has played more international matches for Australia than any other player in women's soccer history. Anissa writes a weekly column for SOCCER TODAY, offering readers a special insight into the women's game. This week: Anissa mourns last Saturday's shock WNSL Grand Final loss to Canberra.

SATURDAY's Grand Final proved to be once again a great disappointment for the Sapphires going down 1-0 to Canberra Eclipse through a Caitlin Munoz goal in the 66th minute.

NSW had gone into the game favourites after a very successful season where we had been undefeated throughout the year only having one draw with Queensland.

However, Saturday's final showed that in a one-off game anything could happen.

Canberra Eclipse had finished last in the previous season and therefore were a vastly improved outfit from the year before.

Canberra had picked up the services of Bridgette Starr in defence and were now able to boast 7 current Matildas in their squad, a large turnaround from previous years.

NSW on the other hand had six Matildas in their squad and a large amount of finals experience, with this being the fourth appearance in the sixth year of the league's existence.

Also we had a large number of players in the squad who had played at least one grand final.

Our preparation started with a lunch together at the Parramatta Leagues club, after this we were given the chance to have a look at the pitch and also assist the Parramatta cheer girls in their pre match routines.

After checking out the surface and making the usual observations we then went for a walk just to take our minds off the game.

The girls took in a game of cricket and indulging in a bit of sledging before getting down to business and concentrating on the task at hand.

After returning to the change room the girls started to focus on the jobs that they were required to perform.

Some of the girls went back out on the pitch to get a feel for the game whilst others stayed in the change room and talked or listened to their favourite music.

All the girls were extremely confident prior to the match and I believe that there were not too many pre match nerves, which is always a good sign.

After coach Allan Bourke's last minute words and a good warm up the girls were pumped for the game.

A large crowd had come to support not only us but Canberra seemed to have also brought a busload of travelling supporters.

So the stage was set for what looked like a very successful afternoon.

After the usual official proceedings - meeting the dignitaries - we were ready for the kick off.

Julie Murray, legend of women's soccer, took the toss for us, hopefully next year she will once again be in a blue shirt, not present because of official duties!

The game started off slowly as do most Grand Finals but I feel throughout the first half we had the better chances, with the Canberra Eclipse Keeper (and current Young Matilda) Lisa Hartley pulling off some great saves.

Lisa was on fire and I think her performance throughout the entire game showed why she is currently the Young Matildas first choice between the posts. Her agility and dominance of her area are exceptional for a keeper so young, a very exciting prospect for the future and for the senior Matilda's team.

I don't think our keeper had a save to make in the first half.

Canberra Eclipse played a very organised pressing game and with the speed of their wide players were always trying to catch us on the fast break.

A number of times Sacha Wainwright was able to sneak in unmarked on the opposite side of attack.

Canberra's current Matildas were all showing why they had been selected in the recent AIS scholarship squad.

We went on the attack numerous times however we were unable to either finish our chances or Lisa made some fine saves.

After half time we were still dominating the game but a lapse in defence saw the Eclipse take the lead. After a breakaway down our right were we were outnumbered Caitlin Munoz was able to slip a ball under both myself and the advancing keeper.

I think it took a while for all of us to settle after this goal.

After dominating most of the game and not being too concerned with the fact that we had not been able to put away our chances we were of the belief that it wouldn't be long before we scored. With 39 goals to our credit throughout the regular season we always had faith and confidence that we would get the goal back.

Unfortunately this would not prove to be the case on the day.

Allan made some changes with 20 to go and with Super sub Catherine Cannuli coming into the fray we were still not too concerned with the score line.

I remember looking up and we had played 86 minutes and I was still not worried believing that the goal would come and with the quality players we had on the pitch it would take no time to score. However, this time it didn't work out that way, and we were not able to pull it out of the hat like we did a couple of weeks previous were we were loosing 1-0 and with 5 minutes to go we scored twice and beat the Eclipse.

When the whistle blew I don't think a number of the girls could believe they had lost. Everyone was extremely disappointed especially our coach Allan who had suffered the same fate the year before and to loose another grand final must had been devastating for him. The girls couldn't have worked any harder it was just one of those games when the woodwork and the keeper got in the road of everything.

Allan tried to console a number of the girls in the change room however many were reduced to tears, especially those who had been in the same situation the year before.

Canberra were undoubtedly ecstatic about the result and so they should be, throughout the entire game they remained focused and disciplined and didn't stop running till the final whistle.

Credit must go the Canberra coaching staff for producing such a great turnaround from the previous season.

I think a lot of credit should also go to their assistant coach Karly Pumpa, who I was told was an inspiration to the team.

NSW on the other hand will have to go back to the drawing board and look forward to the next season hopefully the girls will be able to get a title for Allan third time around!!!

Financial woes continue to dog Sydney United

SYDNEY United is locked in a stand-off with Soccer Australia over unpaid debts and has been barred from picking up national soccer league points until it pays up.

United, which lost 2-1 to the Melbourne Knights at Knights Stadium last Sunday, is believed to owe the league about $9,000.

Soccer Australia said it had written to several clubs which owed money to the NSL a month ago, warning them that they had until March 1 to pay the league.

Soccer Australia said only Sydney United had not paid what it owed and was told it would not be eligible for points until the money was paid.

Any points for the rest of the season are of little consequence to United, which is well out of top six contention.

Controversial United coach Branko Culina said he and his players would not throw in the towel for the rest of the season despite Soccer Australia's ruling.

"Pride is more important than Soccer Australia's decisions," Culina said.

"We may not have a chance to make the top six, but we're a proud club, I'm a proud person and most of my players are proud individuals."

Sydney United was reported to be in financial trouble two months ago, but sold its best player, captain and striker Ante Milicic, for $110,000 to Olympic Sharks to stay afloat for the rest of the season.

But Soccer Australia is struggling under an estimated $3 million debt and cut a deal a fortnight ago to delay $180,000 in match payments to the Socceroos until the end of April.

The ruling body is showing no sign of backing away from its tough stance, leaving the club with little option but to pay up if it wants to avoid the wooden spoon.

It is believed a significant portion of the debt comprises fines.

United president Marko Franovic told the *Sydney Morning Herald* he would not pre-empt the club's response but said he was not impressed with the matter becoming public.

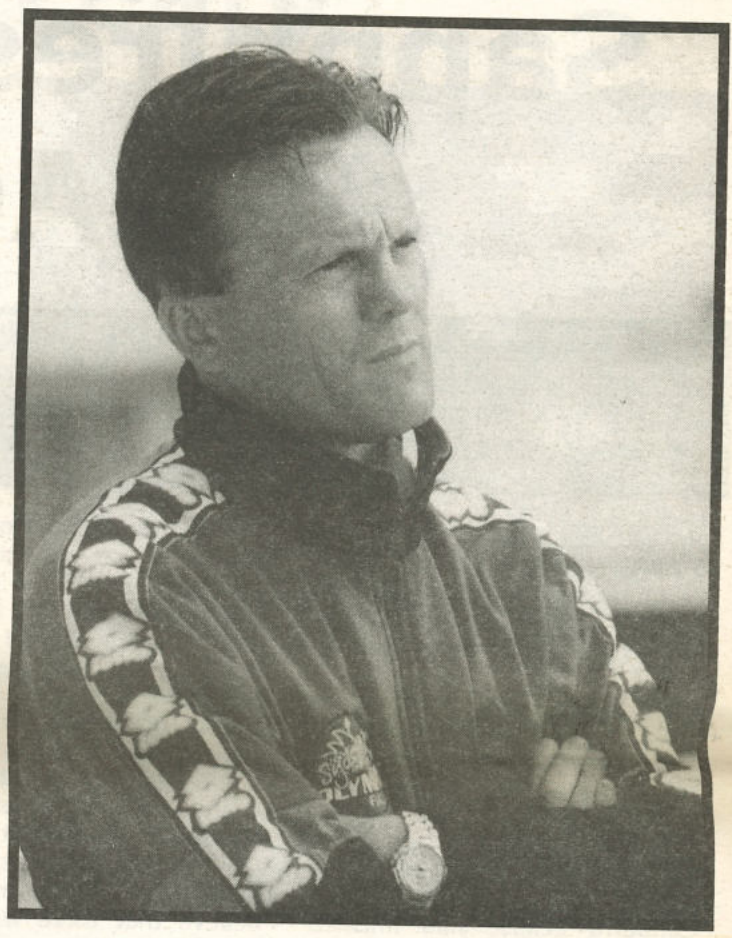
"I could say a lot, but I don't want to cause any more damage to the game," Franovic said.

"I'm not going to start a war over this, but I will say it is highly inappropriate that it has been publicised.

"OK, it doesn't do a great deal for our club, but it doesn't do them [SA] much good either."

Franovic confirmed he was likely to step down when the club held its annual general meeting on April 7, which is to be preceded by an open forum for interested parties to discuss the future of the club. It is believed one topic will be whether the club should move home games from Edensor Park to Penrith Stadium.

"I will probably step down - there are a few reasons including my health - but that doesn't mean I will be walking away from the club," Franovic said. "Let me make one thing clear:



Sydney United are in a lot better position than many other clubs ... but we do have to do a lot of thinking about our future, that's clear. I'm not bitter or negative about what has happened ... I'm just sorry I couldn't have done more."

Mitchell praises Power despite Perth defeat

PARRAMATTA Power's hopes of reaching the Top Six may be null and void following Saturday night's 4-2 defeat to Perth Glory, but coach David Mitchell praised his side for their courage under fire.

Mitchell, who spent three weeks in the Netherlands while his side collapsed to consecutive losses, returned to the fray last week in what was essentially a do-or-die mission for the western Sydney club.

Despite dominating the first 20 minutes of an enterprising affair, Power allowed the Glory to steal a swift three-goal lead before fighting back with two of their own.

"There was plenty of heart and effort and some good football from my side," Mitchell said.

"I put Damien Brown upfront with Brett Holman because over the last few weeks we haven't been scoring goals and it has been a bit disappointing.

"Damien has played in this position before and he did well but at the end of the day the best side won.

"There were a couple of situations where we could have leveled.

"After half time we hit the bar and there was a penalty decision early in the game that could have changed things for us.

The loss sees the Power's finals hopes dashed as it slips into eighth position on the ladder.

The Power heads to New Zealand this week to face likely wooden spooners, the Kingz FC.

The Power players will head to Auckland on Thursday night to prepare for the Friday night game.

The last time the teams met was in Round 10 at Parramatta Stadium when the Kingz staged an amazing fightback to snatch a draw.

The Kingz were down 2-0 at half time but clawed their way back to equalise in the last minute of the game.

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SOCCER SKILLS

MANAGING INJURY

By Jimmy Fraser
former Australia World Cup goalkeeper

AS goalkeepers, the types of training exercises we do places stress on the body continuously with high impact drills forming a large percentage of our training program.

Throughout a normal session we sprint, dive, pivot and stretch with our body constantly being pushed to the limit while we strive to improve our game.

In our normal session depending on the activity and the intensity of the drills the keeper may hit the ground literally hundreds of times, and even when this is done with technical proficiency the trauma to the body can cause pain that is not evident throughout the session.

With the constant repositioning and balls being fired at us from all angles and varying speeds it is often our hands that suffer if we misjudge a ball hit at pace.

Shoulder soreness and injury accompanied by bad backs are a constant reminder of just how hard we punish ourselves at training. Pain in someway or another is a constant companion to goalkeepers as we cannot avoid it all together we should learn to minimize the risks and manage injuries sensibly.

The warm up drills and stretching exercises we do before training, when completed properly ensures that our body is prepared for the session. This pre session preparation should be completed diligently with an understanding of the stretching exercises, it is important that we do not just go through the exercises without understanding their application. If we understand the exercises and we get a muscle twinge during the session we will know what stretch to do to relieve the pain, or if it is serious to stop either the drill or training completely.

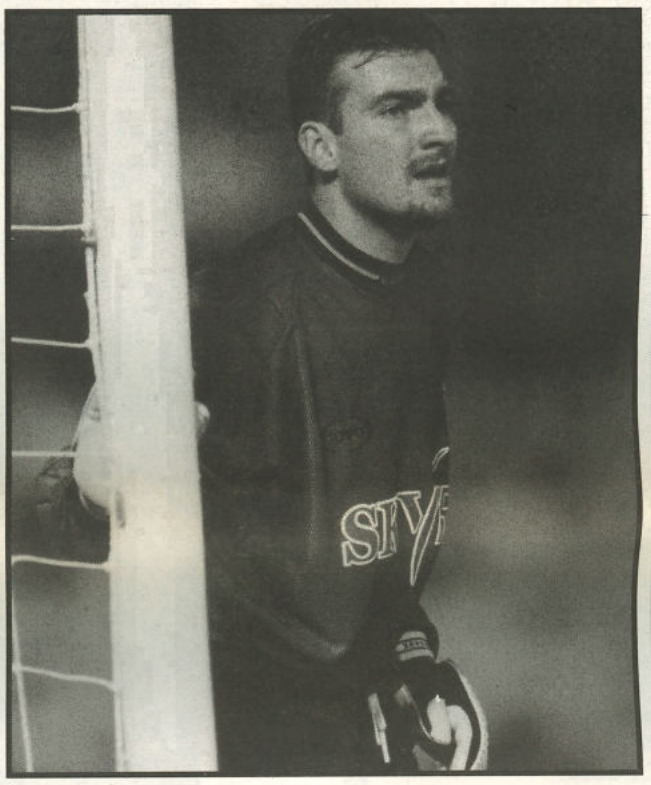
When stretching and warming up we must cover the complete range of movement in all parts of our body including the neck which is often neglected and is stressed every time we dive.

In my clinics we not only instruct on stretching but our young keepers are required to nominate a stretch, demonstrate it and explain its function to the instructor.

This ensures that the keeper is capable of completing a proper warm up and stretching routine prior to the match or training session.

The importance of a warm up and stretching routine to prevent and manage injury cannot be stressed enough and should always form the first part of our session.

It is the keeper's responsibility to ensure that this routine is completed prior to the session if the coach does not allow the time or does not complete an individual keeper related warm up and stretching session. Arriving at training early to do this may save you an injury that may cause you to miss games. Your playing gear can also lessen injuries and protective gear should



be worn at all times to lessen the impact when we dive. Good quality gloves with finger strengtheners will certainly lessen finger injuries, which are the most common injuries in keepers. While gloves are an expensive item not only do they lessen injuries they also build keeper confidence and should be worn at all times when training and playing.

If we are unlucky enough to sustain an injury while training or playing it is important that it is treated initially and diagnosed after by a physio or doctor for ongoing treatment. Players are notorious for not adhering to treatment and we must be disciplined about any rehabilitation program that is given to us. The immediate treatment that is given can lessen the recovery time and if ice is not available at your sessions you should carry a disposable ice pack as part of your gear at all times. These are available at chemists and you simply open and shake and apply to ice the injury immediately. Prevention is always better than cure and a fit body that is warmed up and stretched will resist injury, be disciplined in your warm up, the top keepers are. When returning from injury it is always a problem as to when is the right time to begin training. Many careers have been shortened by players returning to early. While it may be hard to sit on the bench and watch your mates play while you are recovering don't rush back to early and prolong your recovery.

You are the one who knows when you are ready and it is better to wait an extra week and be properly recovered than come back early and risk a longer recovery.

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Northern Spirit uncertain about visit to Sydney United's Edensor Park cauldron

By Derek Royal

NORTHERN Spirit coach Mick Hickman knows that this Sunday's visit to Sydney United won't be easy.

And he knows that despite United's continued financial woes off the field and the possibility that they won't be playing for competition points until certain debts are settled, victory is vital for confidence and team harmony.

Not so long ago Spirit looked down and out, with their hopes of a place in the Top Six all but shattered.

But thanks to the unpredictability of the teams fighting for fourth through to sixth place on the ladder, the boys from North Sydney Oval are in with a shot at the title.

Seriously.

While Perth Glory has deservedly won the minor premiership for finishing the season first-past-the-post, none of the other sides in contention for the Finals are unbeatable, especially in a sudden death play-off.

But then again, neither is Glory, as Melbourne Knights showed at the business end of last season.

Spirit plays a Sydney United side on Sunday with six former Spirit players on the United books: Gabriel "Chi Chi" Mendez, Michael Cunico, Elvis Olic, Daniel Watkins, John Perosh and Paul Bilokapic.

And while the teams' respective positions on the table would suggest a romp for Spirit, nothing could be further from the truth.

Sydney United has won five of the seven matches against Northern Spirit with the Spirit winning two.

There has never been a draw and Sydney United won the game earlier this season 2-1 at North Sydney Oval.

To make matters even more sobering for Northern Spirit fans, their side has not won a game away from home since it defeated the Kingz in Auckland in Round 10.

But despite the stats, coach Hickman should be relatively confident of stealing the spoils after last Friday's dogged 2-1 win over the Kingz.

"Overall that was a good performance from us," Hickman said of the Kingz game.

"I thought we played some good football and the midfield is starting to get forward and get more involved in our attack.

"The only problem was that we let the Kingz dominate for 20 minutes after the break but we showed that we still wanted to win and fought our way back into it and scored the winner."

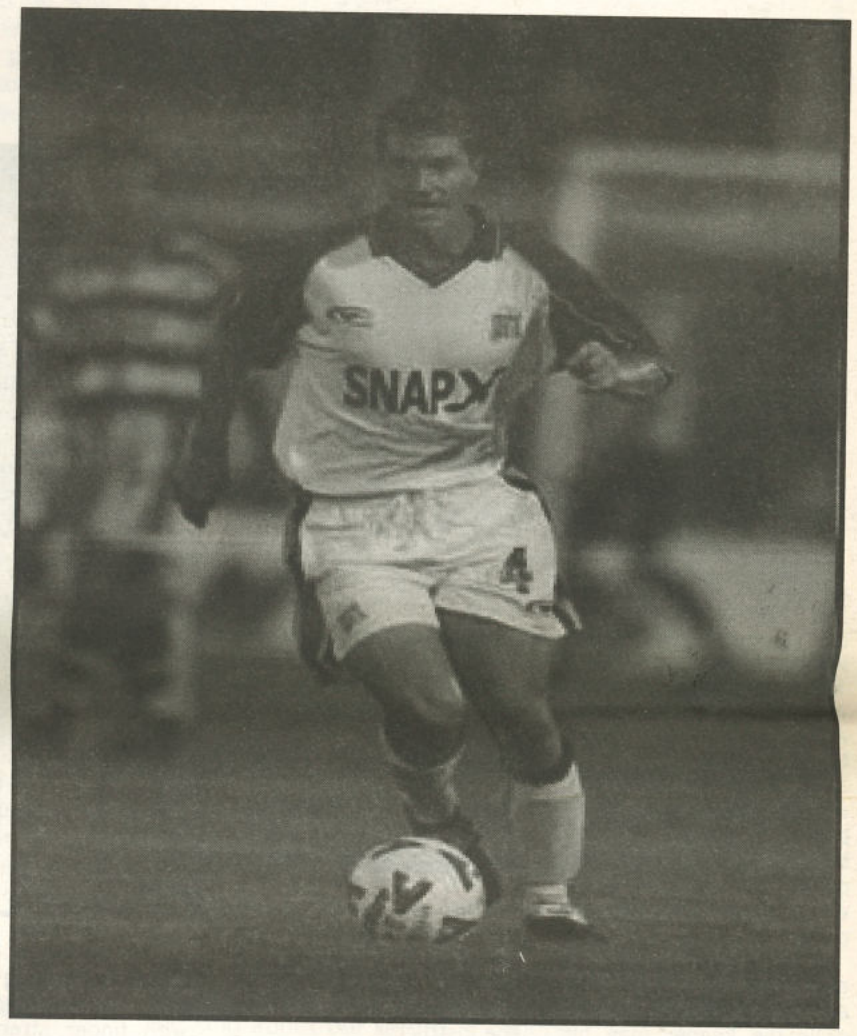
Hickman also praised the contribution made by sharpshooters Adrian Cervinski and Pablo Cardozo.

"Adie (Cervinski) and Pablo played well," Hickman said.

"It was great to see them both score but I was more impressed with the way they are starting to play off one another.

"They are starting to forge a much better partnership and that is a good sign for us.

"The win has kept us in sixth place and allows us to continue the fight for another week. "We now have three more games and they are three games we can win.



"So we know what is in front of us and we have to win.

"We are focussed on the task ahead."

While Spirit remains in sixth place following their victory over the Kingz, Cardozo moved to third on the 2001/02 leading goalscorers list after scoring his 11th of the season.

He is now level with Perth's Bobby Despotovski and behind Brisbane's Paul Foster (13) and Damien Mori (16).

Spirit may sue over Boutsianis

NORTHERN Spirit have announced they may sue if South Melbourne grabs a place in the NSL playoffs ahead of them.

General manager Colin Mitchell admitted his club is considering the move after no punishment was dealt out to South for playing Con Boutsianis in its 2-1 win over te Kingz in January.

"If we go out and win all our games, we believe that will be enough to make the top six," Mitchell said. "Our destiny's in our own hands.

"But if we miss out by a point, we would consider all our options. We've got obligations to all of those who put money into the club - the sponsors, supporters and the players."

Boutsianis had been cleared to South by the Kingz just over a week before the match provided he didn't play in the game, but South changed its mind and played him because it claimed the Kingz had breached confidentiality aspects of the agreement.

Before the match NSL general manager Stefan Kamasz threatened South Melbourne with the loss of any points it won in the match of they played Boutsianis, but he played anyway and scored a late winner.

The matter was scheduled to go before the NSL Tribunal with South facing a disrepute charge, but Soccer Australia took it away from the NSL and said no action would be taken because the clubs needed to deal with the matter between themselves.

Since the win South Melbourne has turned a terrible season around and has gone eight matches unbeaten to move to within two points of the sixth-placed Spirit with a match in hand with

Letters to the Editor

May be sent on any subject relative to football. Letters should be kept brief, preferably relative to a single point. The Publisher reserves the right to alter (for the sake of grammar or clarity) or delete any letter. Address all correspondence to royal_publishing@yahoo.com.au or Soccer Today at PO Box 566, Kogarah, NSW 2217 or by fax to (02) 9588-6500. A contact name and telephone number must be supplied although nom-de-plumes may be used. Unidentified or unsigned letters will not be printed under any circumstances.

What is Bankstown doing to its youngsters?

Dear Sir,

Yet again the New South Wales Premier League club Bankstown City Lions are putting their players on the brink of soccer suicide.

The Under 19's game against Bonnyrigg White Eagles wasn't a disaster, it was club suicide.

Not only did they degrade the club but also its young players.

Yes, the young players must be congratulated on their courage and heart in playing this game even though some were from the youth 15's and 17's (and play they did) but what can a 15 or so year old lad achieve against a 19 year old or a relegated first grader?

Only defeat and defeat it was to a score of a 10-0 loss.

BUT a lot of people present at this game will highly COMMEND Bonnyrigg's coach Mr Stan Ackerly who after his team's win left them and came to the losing team to lift their spirits.

He also made certain his team knew they didn't play an equal opponent but played young lads.

CONGRATULATIONS to him and to Mr. Bruno Jasiczek von Castello who we found out is highly experienced and did not give up on his young team.

No congratulations out to Bankstown, their committee and of course yet again club politics.

Only congratuations to the young lads for playing their hearts out the whole game.

However, this is not how you teach lads experience.

Regards
Concerned Spectator
(Name and Address Provided)

Sharkettes not just pretty faces

Hi there,

When I first saw the Sharkettes in your publication I had a coronary.

It wasn't that I felt the girls were being exploited for their good looks and great bodies, I just didn't believe that cheerleaders belonged in a soccer publication.

My husband agreed.

But then a funny thing happened - I actually read one and then the following week I read another and now the Sharkette story is one of the first I look out for.

Why the turnaround?

I have discovered that these young women are not just beautiful but they're also very talented individuals.

For starters, the twins' high school academic success blew away the bimbo stereotype forever.

Then the energy and the dedication of Wendy, the head cheerleader also shone through in your article - and she seems to be so calm and reassuring.

Then there was Chanelle, who had represented Australia at the World Chapionships as a rhythmic gymnastics. Coby? Well, she not only cheerleads for the most glamourous dance troup in the country, but she's also an elite athlete in two sports! What a blow-out!

I know I've gone on and this is a complete and utter turnaround, but I'd just like to say that I've been converted and these girls deserve all the success they receive. Oh, and by the way, your articles about them are great - light, not too serious and easy to read. Finally, my apologies for leaving a rude message on your answering machine about the girls, I take it back.

(Name and Address provided)

Sharks coach praises courageous effort

OLYMPIC Sharks have been called many things this season but never courageous.

No, such a word has not been used to describe the boys from Sydney's southern beaches.

But last Sunday coach Gary Phillips gave his boys a well-earned pat on the back for overcoming fellow title-contenders Brisbane Strikers for the most part with just 10 men.

Socceroo defender Steve Laybutt received his marching orders from referee Simon Micallef in the latter stages of the first half and in his absence the Sharks battled their way through a tenacious opponent that refused to lie down.

The victory boosted the Sharks' hopes of finishing second at the completion of the regular season, a position that carries plenty of advantages.

Young striker Dylan MacAllister scored two minutes into the second half, and the refusal of a reduced Olympic defence to surrender, won the game for the home side.

"We showed a lot of courage. There were ten heroes on the park," Sharks coach Gary Phillips said.

"I had my concerns about the red card and it was obvious from the reaction of the Brisbane players that they were also surprised.

"But Brisbane is a good side and no doubt they'll be back for revenge for the finals,".

MacAllister used shear strength and dogged determination to stun Brisbane with his goal.

He ran onto a long ball, charged into the penalty area to break through tackles by Shane Stefanutto and Adam Webber, lost control, recovered and then slammed the shot home from the penalty area.

The teams shared first half chances with misses hosted by Shark' Laybutt, MacAllister and Lindsay Wilson and Foster and Richie Alagich for Brisbane.

Brisbane poured into the Olympic defence after the goal and bombed three clear chances in six minutes.

Keeper Clint Bolton's legs blocked a shot from Fernando Rech while Alagich and Stuart McLaren headed wide in front of an open goal.

Bolton was magnificent between the sticks but Strikers coach John Kosmina surprisingly said the send off hurt his side more than the Sharks.

"The send off hurt us more," Kosmina said. "

It always happens against ten men because they lift their game and we were a bit sloppy," said Strikers coach John Kosmina.

"I was very surprised at the red card but we still have four games left."

Fairfield Hotspurs promoting mateship and fun

By Adam Leto

FAIRFIELD Hotspurs all-age side have gone back to the basics in preparation for their upcoming season in the Southern Districts amateur Premier League this season.

With the talent and ability in the team, it will be hard for a lot of these players to come to grips with keeping it simple, but coach Vic Zappia is adamant that their new approach will reap the rewards.

"A lot of the boys have been together since 98 when we moved over from AC United," Zappia explains.

"Last season we finished rock bottom, and that was largely due to a lot of the guys we had in the team that thought they were too good. These guys thought they were hot-shots or Maradonas but this year we've just got a team of mates that all get along really well."

The man most of the players look to is defender Adam Ciantar. The former NSL player, was forced into retirement due to a horrendous run with injuries which saw him undergo two knee reconstructions in as many years.

After getting the call-up to come in and have a run with a few of his mates this season, it was an opportunity that Ciantar was never going to pass up.

"Everyone is here basically because they want to be here and just love playing the game," Ciantar affirms.

"At the end of the day that's what sport is all about, and I think that after playing at a higher level you can see the difference with the guys that play for the love of it, and the guys that play for money or whatever other reason. Everyone is here to have a good time and do something that they enjoy doing."

There is no doubting that Ciantar already has the respect of his players, with most players admitting that they'd throw themselves off cliffs if that's what he told them to do.

"It's something that I don't mind, and I guess I'm just lucky to be able to have worked hard enough to get their respect," he says.

"He's the "Governor"," explains right back Robert Anderson. "Whatever he tells us to do, we do."

But in this game one man can never make a team, so Ciantar is fortunate to have plenty of willing and capable hands at his disposal. Anderson who has been with the club for the past five seasons, explains the closeness of the team and how they manage to share a joke and still perform at their optimum.

"We've got a few guys who like to have a joke and muck around at training. But they're usually the most serious guys on the park as soon as the whistle blows."

As for his own efforts, the strong defender is more forthright.

"The mind's willing but the body is just not listening sometimes," Anderson admits.

Stopper Alex Monari agrees with his teammates assessment and puts it down to all the work that the boys put in at training.

"We don't really do too much fitness work," the 29-year-old concedes. "There aren't really too many policies we have in the side such as no sex before the game or anything like that."

The man who refers to himself as Donny from DeNiro's (DeNiro's being the popular café in Fairfield where most of the players congregate during the week) chimes in with his thoughts.

"I don't really have to worry about being celibate because I can't get any anyway," he jokes.

The popular defender admits that he has passed on his role of team organiser to that of Ciantar, and is comfortable with his new role in the side. "I'm basically the guy that when things go wrong I get the blame for. That's O.K I'm happy to take a hit for the team.

"If the guys want someone to take the piss out of, that's what I'm there for."

Joey "Barbs" is another apparent scapegoat who after the sides narrow first round loss, has been hounded by his teammates for missing numerous opportunities in front of goal.

"I'm not a striker, I think they just moved me up front because I couldn't run anymore," he says.

"My role in the team is just to miss goals, but if I manage to get one this season I'll be happy."

Adding to the side's ready preparation is the closeness that the side shares, and with two sets of brothers in the team, this bunch is closer than most sides in their competition. Brothers Jason and Adam Ciantar and Paul and Dean Trimboli also enjoy a bit of friendly family rivalry.

"He likes to think that he's the boss of me, both on and off the field," explains the younger Trimboli brother Dean.

"He's been barking orders at me most of my life and I haven't listened so I don't see I why I should start now. Especially when I'm bigger than he is."

Friendship and team closeness are often over-used when it comes to describing teams and their performances. But when it comes to describing the atmosphere and camaraderie within this Hotspurs side the description is more than apt, even if someone is getting the piss taken out of.

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THE WORLD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF

FOOTBALL

A COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

- Fascinating profiles of the world's greatest players and personalities
- In-depth features on the top international clubs and national teams
- Magic moments, games and goals from over a century of soccer

TOM MACDONALD

THERE have been plenty of football encyclopedias published over the years, but not many are on par with The World Encyclopedia of Football by Tom Macdonald.

This extensive insight into the world of football covers everything from great matches of the past and present to an a to z to some of the game's finest players.

Not only does it contain a profile of the legends of the game such as Best, Pele etc, but includes some of the modern day greats such as the Beckhams and Figos.

The profile doesn't just end with who they played for and for what clubs but actually includes the defining moments in their careers with all the peaks and slides.

For instance it was interesting to find out that Italian World Cup hero Paolo Rossi was banned from playing for three years prior to his role in Italy's success in the 82 World Cup due to his involvement in a betting and bribes scandal.

The attention to detail allows not only for the pure football enthusiast but also adds value to basically anyone with an interest in sport.

Also included are interesting features on some of the events that have helped mark the game and go down not only as part footballing history but will be remembered as world events that have had an impact on society that only this sport could.

They include the great Stadium disasters throughout the 20th century, the development of the game, world and club football from the 60s through to today and how super clubs such as Real Madrid, Manchester United and Juventus reached their status.

The most significant feature is that it's remarkably up to date and features all the latest players, movements and statistics of the modern game.

Games such as the 2000-2001 Champions League final are mentioned and it's good to see that most of the players and clubs analysed actually include most of the current squad and how they have fared most recently. This is one of its main strengths and means that it will be some time before it becomes obsolete.

However once you're done (this will take some time) going through the 250 odd pages of footballing nostalgia there are always the extremely detailed photographs to gloss over.

You can really feel the emotion of each shot, and the clarity is something that really has to be seen. This will be the closest you can get to the pitch without being there, such is the genius of these photographs. For the football-lover this is a must have for no other reason than the satisfaction that is gained by treading back through history and recalling all those magical moments.

For those without the same level of footballing passion, still looking for a good read or sports encyclopedia to add to their collection then it's also well worth checking out.

HYUNDAI

Teams seeking ultimate dream at Australian five-a-side Nationals

AUSTRALIA'S best five-a-side teams will compete at the National Finals at Parklea this Sunday, and the prize will be the opportunity to play at the World Cup in Korea.

Teams from all over Australia have been competing in separate state events and the Nationals will determine which team proceeds to the Regional Final in Singapore.

From there, Korea beckons.

Hyundai is holding the tournament to mark its official sponsorship of the 2002 FIFA World Cup.

The five-a-side finals will take place in Korea the week presiding the FIFA World Cup.

Hyundai's General Manager Marketing, Mr Peter Evans said that in supporting this unique series, Hyundai is acknowledging the importance of amateur participation in the world game.

"We (Australia) may have missed the opportunity to participate in the 2002 FIFA World Cup but the sheer talent we are witnessing at an amateur level suggests we have every chance of making it through to the Hyundai five-a-Side World Cup Finals," Mr Evans said.

"The competition is an excellent chance to showcase the talent of Australia's up and coming amateur players.

"It also gives them the chance to compete against such giants of the soccer world as Germany, France, Brazil and the UK," he said.

Chairman of Soccer Australia Ian Knop said he welcomed the initiative of Hyundai, describing them as strong supporters of the world game who also backed the Socceroos in their world Cup qualifying matches against Uruguay last November.

"It's very pleasing to find a prominent company such as Hyundai willing to support soccer at the grassroots level in Australia," Mr Knop said.

"The more international opportunities that local players at the amateur level are provided, the further our great code will grow in Australia" he said.

The rules and format of this unique five-a-side tournament have been developed to promote speed and ball skills as key team attributes and to create a spectator friendly fast moving game.

Matches are played on a small 50-metre pitch over two ten-minute halves. If there is no score at the conclusion of play, an additional period of five minutes each way is played. If still there is no score, the match is decided by penalty shoot-out.

Separate state events have been held to determine which teams go on to the national finals.

HYUNDAI

The finals will comprise three teams each from New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland and one team each from South Australia and Western Australia.

These teams will travel to Sydney for the National finals on March 17.

The national winning team will then fly to Singapore for the regional finals and the chance go on to the World finals in Korea.

In true reflection of the appeal and popularity of the World game, Australia will be joined in the series by Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, Austria, Greece, Holland, Switzerland, Norway, Finland, Belgium, France, Germany, Poland, Russia, Croatia, Slovenia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Brazil, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Ecuador, Chile, Uruguay, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, Canary Islands, South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, Guam, Indonesia, Korea, United States of America, China and Japan.

SOCCER TODAY!

Available at newsagencies around Australia every Thursday

Socceroo conditioner Crea just loves his job

By Robbie Bartolillo

IN MOST sporting events, victors are invariably heard praising the unnoticed efforts of the people behind the scenes.

In golf it's the caddie, in horse racing it's the track-work rider, in boxing it's the trainer, and in soccer, the majority acknowledge the tireless input of coaches.

Now we can officially embrace a second form of the integral, footballing support network: the physical conditioner.

Week in week out, we hear of various players' battles with injury, whether it be a passing virus, or career threatening knee re-construction.

We hear how they might play against one team, be rested for another, oblivious to the round the clock, remedial treatment, implemented by the aptly named conditioner.

Anthony Crea's day begins at 5am.

He works with various clients, advising and motivating them, on everything from nutrition to basic muscle stretching.

His composed demeanour enables an apathetic and understanding approach towards those willing individuals, who endure hours of rigorous physical sacrifice.

At 11.30am, Crea departs his office at ARC Therapy, recuperating from the hectic pre-lunch session.

Two to three hours of rest is vital, as his day will officially end at 10pm.

So what does the afternoon session involve?

As he explains: "I'll keep seeing clients all the way until 10. And of course in between, I'll have training with the boys".

The 'boys' Crea alludes to are none other than the Marconi Stallions, where he's responsible for the first grade teams' fitness training.

In his fourth year as the Stallions' conditioner, Crea works closely with coach Lee Sterrey, ensuring the players are physically sharp, and aware of their bodies' requirements.

His degree in Sport Science and current undertaking of a nutrition course suitably qualifies Crea to oversee every aspect of the Stallions' needs: from the players' diets, to the general maintenance of their well being.

Indeed the nuggetty looking Crea can be seen at most Stallions' games, the tremendous rapport and influence he has with the squad, evident in pre-game, and half-time warm ups.

As Stallions' striker and playmaker, John Maisano explains: "He's as professional as they come.

And any rewards he's had with the Aussie team, has been basically because he deserves it."

What, the Aussie team?

Yes that's right, 28 year old Crea also doubles as the Socceroos' physical conditioner, where his role is not too dissimilar to his Stallions' post.

"I was the physical trainer. I took care of, in conjunction with the physio (Les Gillis); the rehabilitation of injured players, any extra fitness work that needed to be done with the team.

"This was either done with individual players or as a collective group, in liaison with Frank (Farina) and Graham Arnold."

A former Marconi junior himself, Crea's recognisance with the Socceroo squad was a culmination of fortune, perseverance and a simple case of being in the right place, at the right time.

As he recalls: "I basically stopped playing at the age of 22, undertook my degree at university, and then it came back around when Farina got the job at Marconi (coach) and he asked me if I wanted to come in and do all the fitness work.

"Since then, I had Eddie (Krncevic) as a coach for two years, now Lee Sterrey, so I've gone full circle pretty much as a player, and am now in the back group staff."

Undoubtedly, the Uruguay experience ranks among Crea's most cherished footballing memories.

The culmination of sheer awe and admiration mixed with the introduction of varying training attitudes and elite professionalism, was indeed an eye opener for Crea.

He recalls: "It's great to work at that level because the players are so professional, and they look after themselves immaculately.

"It was good to see Paul Okon to train the way he does, and Harry Kewell doing the extra work.

"For example, Harry would stay back after training, doing his own work for another hour, after we've trained for an hour and a half.

"So that's the level these guys are at."

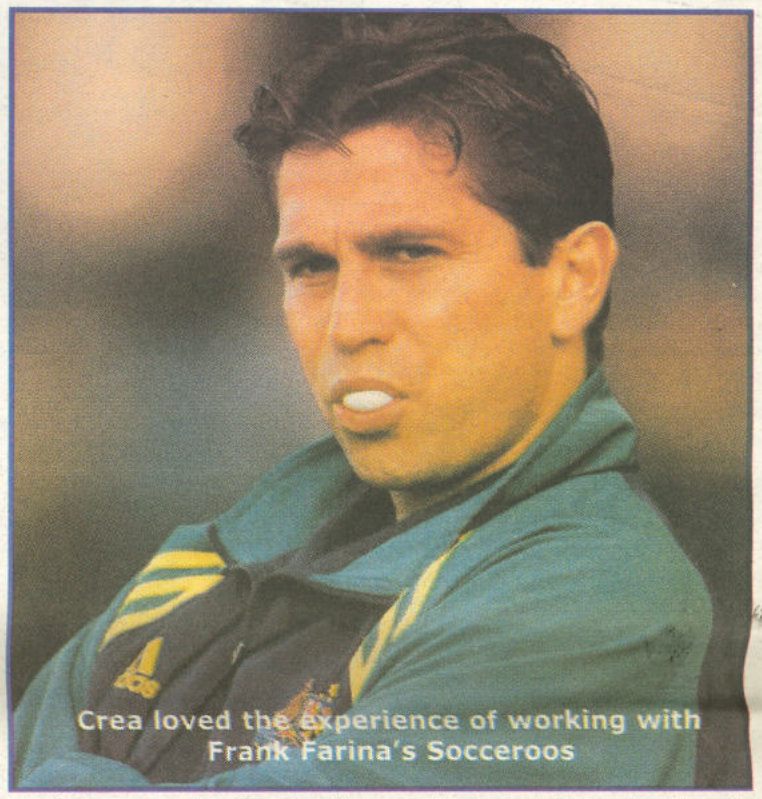
The inflated salaries elite players earn is widely regarded as ridiculous, simply too much.

But Crea is very much in favour of huge player payments.

"You start to appreciate, that they earn a lot of money, but the Viduka's and Kewells of the world, deserve all the money and accolades they get. They work very, very hard at their trade".

Amid the turmoil and scandal surrounding the Socceroos' reception at Montevideo airport, Crea could not help but feel a little anxious.

Understandably so, with thirty or so thugs, (set up or not) reiterating the South Americans' distaste for foreigners, and indeed opposing football sides.



Crea loved the experience of working with Frank Farina's Socceroos

Yet Crea's passion for soccer, accommodated a curious mix of intrinsic emotions.

As he explains: "Uruguay was one of the best experiences of my life.

"When it comes to the soccer side, it was a bit daunting when we got there but that was to be expected.

"The crowd was very intimidating for me and I can just imagine how more it was for the players, even though they're all professional, and are used to playing in front of those crowds.

"But the people were so passionate, that it just made it that little bit more intimidating."

How intimidating was it?

Basically, it makes Australia's cricketing sub-continent tour, and rugby league's British tour, appear reminiscent to a suburban, Saturday afternoon crowd.

The occurrences of Uruguay are indeed difficult to fathom, especially with most commercial coverage (once every four years), concentrating on our apparent dismal failure or lack of sufficient talent.

There is no doubt we failed to perform, but perhaps with the aid of Anthony Crea's insight, one can appreciate the monumental barrier, the Uruguayan custodians erected.

"I was warming up Paul Agostino and two old plastic sauce bottles landed beside us," he said.

"We didn't know what they were, so we went to have a look.

"They were full of sand, so we quickly moved away.

"Also, there was one stage where they (crowd) were throwing 20 cent pieces cut in half, which were very sharp.

"A few of them landed on the pitch, and a few of the boys were wondering what they were.

"We had to move the warm up area again."

Atrocious acts such as these in Australia would see the offender facing attempted murder charges; such is the elevated position of soccer in South America, where only God, by a minimal margin is deemed superior.

How Farina and co. made it home alive is a wonder!

Anthony Crea represents the future of sport, and more specifically soccer.

Whether it is working with the Stallions or indeed the Socceroos, his greatest fulfilment is not the travelling, the perks, the monetary reward.

He just loves players battling the demoralising effects of injury, and under his advice, see them back on the park. There is no doubt that the role Crea plays is a necessity, an asset that eventually will become widely appreciated.

The Grass Roots Game sponsored by
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AC United Under 11s confident of a successful 2002

By Adam Leto

AC UNITED's Under 11s cadet league side would have to rate as one of the strongest teams for their age-group in New South Wales.

Playing in the Super Cadet league, the second highest division in the state, United have shown enough during pre-season to suggest that they will be one of the team's to beat in their respective competition.

The young United side haven't lost a game in the lead-up to the kick off of their competition on April 7 beating sides that are playing in the higher Premier Youth League.

"Last year our 11s were very strong whilst our 12s were average, and this year both our 11s and 12s are very strong," Youth Convenor Frank Barilla told *Soccer Today*.

"The majority of the 11s are made up of the under 10s side that competed in the district last season and they did very well last season.

"Most of the players are of a very high level and know what is expected to do well."

United has been impressive, defeating more illustrious sides such as St.George and the Leichhardt Tigers in trial matches.

But despite a solid lead-up Barilla is aware that pre-season form goes straight out the window come the start of the regular season.

"We've played Premier Youth League sides and beaten them so the signs are there that we should do well this year," he says.

"Most of these guys have played together before so they know each other fairly well."

The Wetherill-Park based side also participated in the inaugural Celestino Foti Perpetual Trophy held by local rivals Marconi.

The event was a huge success between two highly skillful youth sides, with a hunger for the game.

In the 11s the much fancied Stallions side were pushed all the way by United in what turned out to be an entertaining 2-2 draw.

"Without sounding biased, that was a game that we should've won," admits Barilla.

"But we were proud of our efforts and the day itself was a huge success."

Coach of the 11s is Andy McGrath who has brought the core of the side through the junior ranks together to reach their current status.

"That's probably their main strength in that a lot of the side has been kept together over the years, and that main core of players are still there now," Barilla explains.

"The boys are all close and the coach knows the players and what they're capable of."

With so many local teams in the south-west to choose from ranging from National League sides such as Marconi and Sydney United to Bonnyrigg White Eagles and the Fairfield Bulls, it's a testament to the foundation and structure in place at United that they can still attract talented players willing to learn.

"This is my second year at AC United and I would like to see a lot of these younger boys go onto reach a higher level," Barilla says.

"The club has a very good reputation with younger players and our youth league teams have been extremely strong the past three or four years.

"We've been able to attract good players largely due to the fact that we have excellent coaches, facilities and a very dedicated committee.

"Our ultimate aim is to make it to the Premier League, and we've been fairly successful at a Super League level so that's the next step we want to make."

AC United Under 11s held Marconi (pictured) to a draw in the Celestino Foti Perpetual Trophy game.

NSW SUPER CADET LEAGUE

ROUND 1
Sunday 10 March
Bonnyrigg v Mingara Lakers
Bankstown City v Fairfield Bulls
Macarthur Rams v Eastern Suburbs
Canterbury Marrickville v AC United

ROUND 2
Sunday 17 March
Mingara Lakers v Hills United
Bankstown City v Bonnyrigg
Eastern Suburbs v Canterbury Marrickville
Fairfield v AC United

PAT FRASER REAL ESTATE
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THE NSL BIG GAME:
Perth Glory v Newcastle United at Perth Oval Saturday 16 March

PERTH GLORY last week wrapped up the NSL minor premiership with a clinical 4-2 victory over Parramatta Power at Parramatta Stadium.

But now that the men from Australia's far west have already secured bragging rights for finishing first-past-the-post, the visitors could well spring a surprise.

Perth appeared flustered and at times frustrated against the Power, especially when faced with a swarming attack.

However, Perth's clinical finishing ended any hope Power had of stealing the spoils.

But Newcastle is not Parramatta Power.

Newcastle is by virtue of the National League table, the second best team in the land.

And when the sides met at a storm-swpet Marathon Stadium earlier this season, they shared the points in an entertaining draw.

At Parramatta last week Perth hit the Power with three swift goals. Rat-a-tat-tat, just like that and the home side was as good as dead and buried.

But the Sydneysiders fought back with Matt Langdon and Wayne O'Sullivan scoring in a seven minute spell to trail by one goal before substitute Nick Mrdja locked it up for the Glory two minutes from time.

However, the result could have been so different when referee Perry Mur ignored a penalty appeal when Langdon was brought down in the area and then overlooked a Perth back-pass to the keeper by defender Shane Pryce.

"The score line flattered a little bit, but we were always capable of nicking a goal or two," Perth acting coach Alan Vest said.

"We were not sharp in the first 20-25 minutes but I never felt they were really going to make a breakthrough.

"I am pleased we've won the premiership with four games to go and I think the team is capable of taking the double."

Both teams played entertaining soccer with Perth making better use of their chances.

The Glory rode out the opening storm and gradually worked its way back with slick one-touch passing and solid defence.

As Parramatta continued to work hard and the fierce pace continued, Maloney, Bobby Despotovski and Mori began to take control of Perth's attacking raids.

"I made some changes in the front line because we were not scoring and the team played with a lot of heart and effort," Parramatta coach Dave Mitchell said.

"Our chances are very slim of making the top six but we will still try our best.

"The fact that we scored two goals against the league's top team shows we can score too and the sad part of it is that all of our young players are only now coming to the fore."

Meanwhile, Newcastle broke a frustrating run of draws with a 3-1 victory over Marconi Stallions at Energy Australia Stadium.

United started brightly and led 1-0 after 24 minutes.

Joel Griffiths marked his return to the United line-up in style, turning in an inch-perfect cross from Andy Roberts.

Peter Tsekenis extended the lead with a rare goal just three minutes later.

Esali Masi had earlier wasted two clear chances but made amends with a neat through ball to meet Tsekenis' near post run.

If that wasn't bad enough for the visitors, defender Chad Gibson was sent off for a foul on Joel Griffiths before halftime.

Marconi's front pairing of Royce Brownlie and John Maisano toiled hard for the visitors but a lack of quality possession limited them to long-range efforts in the second half.

Despite the numerical advantage, Newcastle struggled to unlock Marconi at times and will need a more ruthless touch as the finals series draws near.

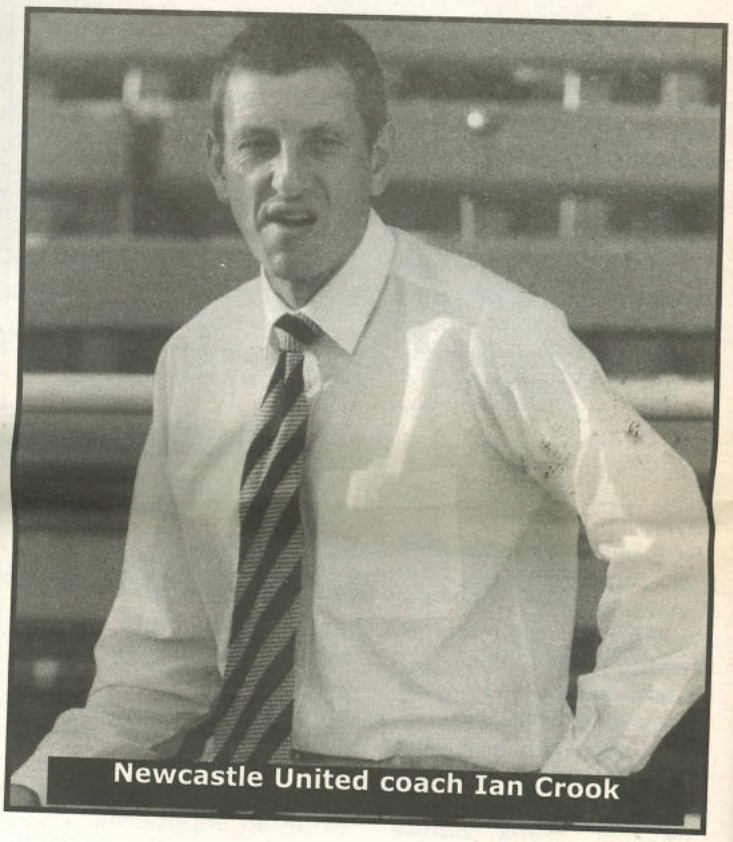
Newcastle ended with a flurry though, as Marconi showed signs of wear.

Robbie Middleby scored another amazing goal with his now famous silver boots to make it 3-1 and new signing Alex Moriera enjoyed the space available when he appeared from the bench with 20 minutes to play.

The Stallions threatened an unlikely comeback when Brownlie scored his fourth goal in two games to make it 2-1 at halftime.

But in a second stanza of few highlights, United made the most of the extra man to take all three points.

Saturday's clash should be a beauty!



Newcastle United coach Ian Crook

The Squads:

Newcastle: D Beltrame (gk), M Prentice, A Roberts, C Zoricich, M Bingley, T Dodd, J Griffiths, D McBreen, P Tsekenis, S Baillie, M Blagojevic, J Schirripa, E Masi, R Middleby, A Moreira, B Swancott (gk)

Players to watch: Griffiths, Schirripa

Perth: J Petkovic (gk), M Horsley, C Deans, G Naven, S Miller, B Maloney, A Edwards, B Despotovski, B Hassell, E Junior, D Mori, S Pryce, D Tarka, N Mrdja, V Matassa (gk)

Players to watch: Mori and Despotovski

X-Factor: Perth is ripe for the picking. They've just completed the minor premiership and Newcastle will be hoping they will be in cruise mode. United needs all the points they can get to stave off the challenge for second from the likes of the Sharks.

Prediction: Newcastle 2-1.

NATIONAL SOCCER LEAGUE PREVIEWS

Wollongong Wolves v Brisbane Strikers at WIN Stadium Friday 15 March

THE Strikers still have their eye on a top-two finish, but will need all three points to fight off challenges from Newcastle and the Sharks.

The Wolves are playing for nothing more then pride and new contracts for next season. Youngsters Dustin Wells and Greg Sharland have impressed in recent weeks so they can expect more game time.

The Strikers will be without defender Wayne Heath who is out with an ankle injury.

The points were shared the last time these two sides met and their last encounter at WIN stadium the Wolves prevailed 2-1.

Possible line-ups

Wolves: 1 D Anastasiadis (gk) 3 A Ceccoli 4 R Stanton 5 D Cervinski 6 A Castro 10 S Young 11 N Sekulovski 13 C Anthopoulos 23 D Mennillo 24 D Wells 25 G Sharland Subs: 9 Z Babic 15 D Huxley 17 B Blake 30 S Whalan (gk)

Players to watch: Sharland, Young

Strikers: 1 J Kearton (gk) 2 R Alagich 3 S Stefanutto 4 J McKain 6 P Grierson 7 F Rech 8 A Webber 9 P Foster 11 J Carbone 15 M McKay 18 L Drake Subs: 10 K Trajanovski 16 Ronnie McQuilter 17 M Baird 20 C Baldock (gk)

Players to watch: Baird, Foster

X-Factor: Whether the Wolves decide to turn up to play or if their minds are already on their post-season trip away.

Prediction: Wolves grit their teeth and get a point

Kingz FC v Parramatta Power at North Harbour Stadium Friday 15 March

THE Power put in their best performance in recent weeks against the Glory at home last round but still came up short. A finals berth is looking less likely every week for the boys from Sydney's west and if they can't get all three points here then it's good night Charlie.

The Kingz continue to plug away, but have little to show for their efforts this season. They gave Spirit a fright last week, but continue to struggle to put the ball away.

The Power have only ever beaten the Kingz once and that was at Ericcson.

Possible Line-ups

Power: 1 L Pogliacomi (gk) 2 D Barrett 3 M Langdon 4 N Orlic 5 A Tobin 7 W O'Sullivan 11 D Brown 16 B Holman 21 A Elrich 24 S Eagleton 28 P Bennett Subs: 15 B Groves 22 J Vrkic 27 A Kwasnik 30 A Carman (gk)

Players to watch: Langdon, Bennett

Kingz FC: 1 M Theoklitos (gk) 2 J Perry 6 G Goutzioulis 9 P Urlovic 11 A Vlahos 12 H Ngata 14 J Markovski 15 M Burton 22 C Banks 24 C Jackson 25 S Douglas Subs: 4 L Osman 13 J Campbell 19 H Miyazawa (gk)

Players to watch: Douglas, Theoklitos

X-Factor: The wet New Zealand weather could turn this one into a scrappy affair with luck bearing the biggest influence on the outcome.

Prediction: Power keep their slim finals hopes alive with narrow victory.

Marconi Stallions v Adelaide City at Marconi Stadium Saturday 16 March

Old rivals clash at Marconi on Saturday night and it should be an entertaining match with both sides throwing caution to the wind and playing with nothing to lose.

The Stallions both the 15 players off contract and coach Lee Sterrey will still be hoping to finish off the season strongly and prove to the club's administrators that they deserve an extension.

City have taken a beating in the past few weeks and with Stallions striker Royce Brownlie in sweet form scoring four goals in his last two matches another lopsided scoreline could be on the cards.

Prediction: Entertaining draw

Possible line-ups

Stallions: 1 M Turnbull (gk) 2 M Beauchamp 5 D Longo 8 G Last 10 J Maisano 12 S Bozinovski 13 S Webb 15 R Brownlie 21 S Trajcevski 22 A Brosque 23 C Gibson Subs: 6 C Care 17 J Afkos 18 S Radulovic 30 B Catlin (gk)

Players to watch: Turnbull, Beauchamp

Adelaide City: 20 D Godley (gk) 2 M Kemp 3 I Fyfe 4 A Kovacevic 7 L Pantelis 8 C Veart 9 R Sareceno 10 A Vidmar 12 S Tunbridge 13 K Rees 18 I Karlovic Subs: 14 A Goulding 23 N Budin 1 A Cagalj (gk)

Players to watch: Tunbridge, Sareceno

X-Factor: City will be happy if they can get through the match without losing any more players and finish the season with a squad of more than 11 players.

Prediction: Entertaining draw

South Melbourne v Olympic Sharks at Bob Jane Stadium Sunday 17 March

The Greek derby is always a fixture that is marked on both sides calendars. Promises to be an exciting match with both sides having an array of skilful talent on display.

The Sharks will also be welcoming back Lindsay Wilson and Ante Milicic from injury and are buoyed by the news that last year's revelation Greg Owens is only a week or two away from returning to the action.

Trimboli returned to his goal-scoring best last week with a couple net-ripping strikes and he always seems to bring out his best when it comes to matches against Olympic.

Possible line ups

South Melbourne: 1 M Petkovic (gk) 2 S Iosifidis 3 F De Amicis 4 M Durakovic 7 S Panopoulos 8 V Coveny 9 P Trimboli 12 R Sekulovski 16 M Murdocca 19 P Kisnorbo 25 C Boutsianis Subs: 10 P Buljan 21 V Lia 26 N Sabljak 23 E Galekovic (gk)

Players to watch: Coveny, Trimboli

Olympic Sharks: 1 Clint Bolton (gk) 2 Stephen Laybutt 8 Tom Pondeljak 9 Dylan Macallister 10 Troy Halpin 11 Jade North 19 A Milicic 23 Andrew Packer 24 Andrew Durante 27 Hiroyuki Ishida 28 Ante Juric Subs: 6 Wayne Srhoj 12 Elias Augerinos 16 Jeromy Harris 17 Fred Agius

Players to watch: Durante, Halpin

X-Factor: The battle between two of Australia's most gifted midfielders in Halpin and Boutsianis will be worth the price of admission alone.

Prediction: Sharks edge out South

Sydney United v Northern Spirit at Sydney United Sports Ctre Sunday 17 March

SPIRIT continue to find a way to win despite not looking too much in control.

Last week was the first time that both Cervinski and Cardozo have scored in the one game all season, which is a reflection on how much they've struggled up front.

United share a similar problem, made easier through the creative efforts of Mendez through midfield. United have proved to be a handful on their day and Spirit will be aware of the danger United pose to their chances of making the Top-Six.

Possible Line-ups

Spirit: *28 V Knezevic (gk) 3 V Savoca 5 N Arrarte 9 G Mendez* 13 A Deur 14 G Talevski 16 C Menapi 17 P Bilokapic 18 D Watkins 23 M Cindric 24 S Sinozic Subs: 12 B Santalab 29 C Cevenini 1 S Minovski (gk)

Players to watch: Bilokapic, Cindric

Northern Spirit: 1 L Acevski (gk) 3 S Bell 4 N Spencer 5 R Trajkovski 6 S Thomas 8 C Foster 9 A Cervinski 10 P Cardozo 12 J Hutchinson 13 M Stergiopoulos 14 M Cartwright Subs: 7 A McDermott 16 S Dobbie 21 A Griffiths 30 J Rex (gk)

Players to watch: Trajkovski, Doobie

X-Factor: Edensor Park hasn't been a happy hunting ground for the Spirit losing two out of the three matches played there.

Prediction: United cause upset win

SOCCER TODAY!

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NSL SCOREBOARD

SPIRIT 2

A Cervinski 08' P Cardozo 76'

KINGZ FC 1

A Vlahos52′ pen
Referee: Con Diomis

NEWCASTLE 3

J Griffiths 24'P Tsekenis 26 'R Middleby 90'

MARCONI 1

R Brownlie 44'
Referee: Peter Green

ADELAIDE CITY 0

STH MELBOURNE 3

P Trimboli 49'/56' M Durakovic 66'
Referee: Mark Shield

POWER 2

M Langdon 74' W O'Sullivan 78

PERTH GLORY 4

'C Deans 38' B Maloney 54 B Hassell 59' N Mrdja 87′
Referee: Angelo Nardi

OLYMPIC 1

D MacAllister 46'

STRIKERS 0

Referee: Simon Micallef

KNIGHTS 2

K Marusic 18 I De Jesus 25' Pen

SYDNEY UTD 1

C Menapi 9′
Referee: Craig Zetter

WOLLONGONG

BYE

Northern Spirit: 1 L Acevski (gk) 3 S Bell 4 N Spencer 5 R Trajkovski 6 S Thomas 8 C Foster 9 A Cervinski 10 P Cardozo 12 J Hutchinson 13 M Stergiopoulos 14 M Cartwright Subs: 7 A McDermott 16 S Dobbie 21 A Griffiths 30 J Rex (gk)
Kingz FC: 1 M Theoklitos (gk) 2 J Perry 6 G Goutzioulis 9 P Urlovic (-45+) 11 A Vlahos 12 H Ngata 14 J Markovski 17 R Hooker (-31') 22 C Banks 24 C Jackson 25 S Douglas Subs: 4 L Osman 13 J Campbell (+45+) 15 M Burton (+31') 19 H Miyazawa (gk)

Newcastle: 1 D Beltrame (gk) 3 A Roberts 4 C Zoricich (-70') 6 M Bingley 9 J Griffiths 11 P Tsekenis 12 S Baillie 13 M Blagojevic 16 J Schirripa (-63') 17 E Masi (-90+) 22 R Middleby Subs: 7 T Dodd (+63') 8 M Wilson (+90'+) 25 A Moreira (+70') 20 B Swancott (gk)
Marconi: 1 M Turnbull (gk) 5 D Longo 6 C Care (-46') 8 G Last (-65') 10 J Maisano 12 S Bozinovski 13 S Webb 15 R Brownlie 21 S Trajcevski (-75') 22 A Brosque 23 C Gibson Subs: 2 M Beauchamp (+46') 17 J Afkos (+65') 18 S Radulovic (+75') 30 B Catlin (gk)

Adelaide City: 20 D Godley (gk) 2 M Kemp 3 I Fyfe 4 A Kovacevic 7 L Pantelis 8 C Veart 9 R Sareceno (-71') 10 A Vidmar 12 S Tunbridge 13 K Rees 18 I Karlovic Subs: 14 A Goulding 22 M Saric (+71' - 76') 23 N Budin (+76') 1 A Cagalj
South Melbourne: 1 M Petkovic (gk) 2 S Iosifidis 3 F De Amicis 4 M Durakovic 7 S Panopoulos 8 V Coveny (-76') 9 P Trimboli 12 R Sekulovski (-81') 16 M Murdocca (-71') 19 P Kisnorbo 25 C Boutsianis Subs: 10 P Buljan (+76') 21 V Lia (+81') 26 N Sabljak (+74') 23 E Galekovic (gk)
Crowd: 2,566 **Venue:** Hindmarsh

Power: 1 L Pogliacomi (gk) 2 D Barrett 3 M Langdon 4 N Orlic 5 A Tobin (-84') 7 W O'Sullivan 11 D Brown (-71') 16 B Holman 21 A Elrich 24 S Eagleton (-71') 28 P Bennett Subs: 15 B Groves (+71') 22 J Vrkic (+84') 27 A Kwasnik (+71') 30 A Carman (gk)
Perth Glory: 1 J Petkovic (gk) 5 C Deans 7 S Miller 8 B Maloney (-85') 10 B Despotovski 12 B Hassell 15 E Aldrighi Junior (-72') 16 D Mori (-68') 17 G Faria 18 S Pryce 23 D Tarka Subs: 9 Alistair Edwards (+72') 14 D Valle (+85') 26 N Mrdja (+68') 30 V Matassa (gk) **Crowd:** 4,075 **Venue:** Parramatta Stadium

Olympic: 1 C Bolton (gk) 2 S Laybutt 7 L Wilson 8 T Pondeljak 9 D Macallister 10 T Halpin (-72') 11 J North 23 A Packer 24 A Durante 27 H Ishida (-69') 28 A Juric Subs: 6 W Srhoj (+72') 12 E Augerinos (+69') 25 Z Caravella 30 B Hughes (gk)
Strikers: 1 J Kearton (gk) 2 R Alagich (-59') 3 S Stefanutto 4 J McKain 5 S McLaren 6 P Grierson 7 F Rech 8 A Webber 9 P Foster (-38') 10 K Trajanovski 11 J Carbone (-69') Subs: 15 M McKay (+38') 17 M Baird (+69') 18 L Drake (+59') 20 C Baldock (gk)
Crowd: 5,234 **Venue:** Toyota Park

Knights: 30 D McGrath (gk) 3 R Vargas 4 S Ognenovski 5 S Horvat 6 A Marth 8 K Marusic 9 J Porter 10 A Da Costa 16 A Kiratzoglou (-85') 18 A Vargas 25 I De Jesus (-73') Subs: 2 J Rajher 11 X Sulemani (+73') 13 I Jolic (+85') 1 M John (gk)
Sydney United: 28 V Knezevic (gk) 3 V Savoca 4 E Olic 5 Nahuel Arrarte 9 G Mendez 13 A Deur (-46') 14 G Talevski (-46') 16 C Menapi 17 P Bilokapic 18 D Watkins 24 S Sinozic Subs: 8 A Moric (+46') 12 B Santalab (+46') 15 A Genc 1 S Minovski (gk)
Crowd: 3,620 **Venue:** Knights Stadium

NATIONAL SOCCER LEAGUE: Standings at Round 22

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Perth Glory	20	15	4	1	46	18	49
2 Newcastle United	21	9	10	2	28	18	37
3 Olympic Sharks	20	11	3	6	29	15	36
4 Brisbane Strikers	20	9	6	5	35	26	33
5 Melbourne Knights	21	10	2	9	35	33	32
6 Northern Spirit	21	8	5	8	28	34	29
7 South Melbourne	20	7	6	7	20	19	27
8 Parramatta Power	21	7	4	10	22	29	25
9 Marconi Stallions	20	6	5	9	24	28	23
10 Wollongong Wolves	20	5	7	8	20	29	22
11 Sydney United	20	5	4	11	23	32	19
12 Adelaide City Force	20	3	7	10	22	33	16
13 Kingz FC	20	3	5	12	24	42	14

LEADING SCORERS

16	MORI Damian	Perth Glory
13	FOSTER Paul	Brisbane Strikers
11	CARDOZO Pablo	Spirit
11	DESPOTOVSKI Bobby	Perth Glory
10	MILICIC Ante	Olympic Sharks
10	PORTER Joel	Knights
9	DA COSTA Antonio	Knights
9	RECH Fernando	Brisbane Strikers
8	URLOVIC Paul	Kingz FC
8	GRIFFITHS Joel	Newcastle
7	MOREIRA Alex	Newcastle
7	BROWNLIE Royce	Marconi
7	MALONEY Brad	Perth Glory
7	MENAPI Commins	Sydney United
7	TUNBRIDGE Scott	Adelaide City
6	MAISANO John	Marconi
5	BUONAVOGLIA John	Power
5	CERVINSKI Adrian	Spirit
5	MASI Esala	Newcastle
5	PONDELJAK Tom	Olympic
5	YOUNG Stuart	Wolves
4	BAIRD Michael	Strikers
4	BOUTSIANIS Con	South
4	CARBONE John	Strikers
4	DE JESUS Ivo	Knights
4	MACALLISTER Dylan	Olympic
4	MIDDLEBY Robbie	Newcastle
4	VLAHOS Andy	Kingz FC
3	ARAMBASIC Zlatko	Power
3	BACAK Joe	South
3	CARLE Nick	Olympic
3	DEUR Ante	Sydney United
3	GOUTZIOULIS George	Kingz FC
3	GULESSARIAN Kevo	Stallions
3	HARNWELL Jamie	Perth Glory
3	HUTCHINSON John	Spirit
3	MARTH Andrew	Knights
3	MCBREEN Daniel	Newcastle
3	NGATA Heremaia	Kingz FC
3	NORTH Jade	Olympic
3	TRIMBOLI Paul	South

THE BRIAN BROWN COLUMN

LAST week I talked about the goal-scoring feats of some teams in the Premier League, and after looking back on the last round my comments have to an extentbeen vindicated.

Last week there were 32 goals scored in six games of football. That's an outstanding achievement and certainly that adds value to the spectator and gives the game at a state level more appeal.

It also reflects the importance that players and coaches are placing on scoring goals rather than sitting back playing defensively.

These guys are going out there and playing positive football and they should be commended for their efforts.

THIS week features one of the biggest games of the season between my Blacktown side and Bonnyrigg.

It's the type of derby match that *really does* get the emotions pumping in both camps and one that I'm sure both sides are looking forward to.

Up until last year Blacktown did have the wood over Bonnyrigg, but that has turned around in the past year, where Bonnyrigg have beaten us in the past few outings.

Of course we'd like to exact revenge on the Bonnyrigg side for last season's Grand Final defeat but it certainly won't be an easy task with Bonnyrigg showing some electric form last week.

It's amazing how much can change in a short amount of time. Last week the White Eagles went down to the Fairfield Bulls and only days later turned in an exhilarating performance to down Bankstown.

They looked extremely sharp and on the ball, and no doubt we will need to match their skill and enthusiasm if we want to get the points.

It will also be an interesting clash between a number of players who have spent time at both clubs.

Three former Blacktown players Jimmy Aschner, Chris Bradley and Fernando Greco go up against former Bonnyrigg players in Paul Dee and David Reid.

I know for a fact that David Reid will be out to have a big one against his former club.

Will Bonnyrigg again be celebrating at the end of this season?

He was absolutely dirty on himself for missing out on our last clash with Bonnyrigg due to suspension and after his four-goal haul last week will be one to watch. There is sure to be a big crowd in attendance and it must be said that the Bonnyrigg supporters are probably the most vocal and passionate in the league.

I'm sure to cop a lot of stick but I'm hoping that if we can get up that the amount of flak I receive won't be half as bad as if we lose.

ANOTHER important match being played on the week-end is between Parramatta and Belconnen.

The Eagles are looking to stay atop of the ladder whilst Belconnen are fighting it out for a finals berth.

Fellow finals aspirants the Fairfield Bulls and Leichhardt Tigers are at home and should win their respective matches.

At this stage it's still impossible to pick the Top Five as the top sides keep winning, but this is sure to change as in the upcoming weeks all these high-flyers will face off against each other, anddetermine who plays in the post-season and who enjoys an early holiday.

FINALLY, the 19s competition has produced some outstanding matches this season and it's a credit to their clubs and coaches that they have been able to maintain such a high level.

Their competition, too is going down to the wire and it's is an excellent opportunity for supporters to go out there and catch some entertaining action in the-lead-up to the finals.

Brian Brown this season coached the NSW state team and heads NSW Premier League side Blacktown City Demons.

NSW PREMIER LEAGUE PREVIEW

THE BIG GAME

Bonnyrigg White Eagles v Blacktown City Demons at Serbian Centre Saturday 16 March

THERE is no doubt that this week's match of the round is the clash between last year's finalists the Bonyrigg White Eagles and the Blacktown City Demons.

Both sides are in top form and coming off big wins last week. The White Eagles disposed of the Bankstown Lions 5-0 in a game that always loomed as dangerous for the joint competition leaders.

Jensen Park has brought plenty of top sides crashing but the White Eagles had too much class *on the night*.

In particular the form of Vuko Tomasevic who's return to the Bonnyrigg side has had a lot to do with their winning form of late.

Defender Tayfun Devrimol has also made a successful return back to the first grade side after an ankle injury had kept him sidelined.

He will have his hands full trying to contain a Demons attack that has looked a lot more penetrative in recent weeks.

The Blacktown side have scored 15 goals in their last four matches and haven't lost a game since their round nine match against the Bankstown City Lions.

Their damaging form is the result of a more settled line-up and a growing confidence and belief in themselves.

Talent has never been something the Demons have lacked this season and with the likes of Paul Dee continually whipping in dangerous balls and David Reid menacing throughout the middle of the park, the Demons have the ability to hurt the White Eagles should they show any complacency.

Having lived in the shadow of the Demons for what seemed an eternity, the White Eagles buried their hoodoo with a convincing win in last year's final.

There is certainly no love lost between the two sides and the boys from Bonnyrigg will be looking to maintain their dominance over the Demons.

The White Eagles have won their last two encounters against Blacktown and will love nothing more than to dent their finals aspirations with another big win in front of what's sure to be a full-house at the Serbian Centre.

With four teams chasing only three remaining finals spots, the Demons are aware that a slip-up here could prove costly in the final wash-up.

David Reid was outstanding for the Demons last week scoring four goals, and probably their most consistent player this season the live-wire Naoki Imaya is proving to be more than a handful for opposing defences.

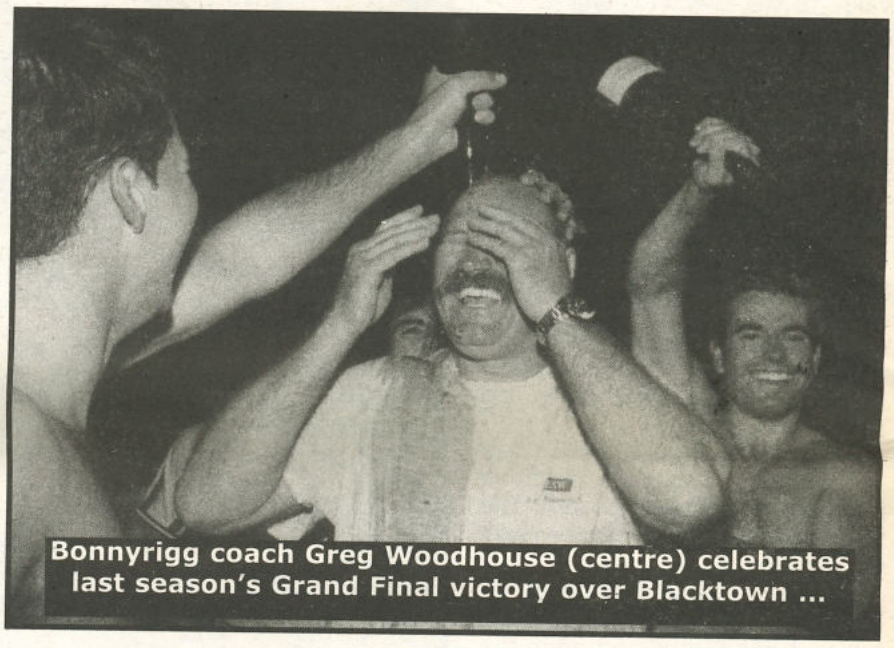
An interesting sidebar to the match is the battle between two of the league's most tactically astute coaches in Brian Brown and Greg Woodhouse.

Woodhouse has taken over the reins as NSW coach, a position that was previously held by Demons boss Brown.

A classic match-up between two fierce rivals in excellent form, this one is shaping up as one of the games of the year and with plenty of talent on the park the action should be non-stop.

Squads

Bonnyrigg White Eagles: 1. Fernando Greco, 2. Sasha Utjesenovic, 4. Bobby Dragas, 5. Tayfun Devrimol, 6. Vuko Tomasevic, 7. Javier Mancino, 8. David Harding, 9. Shane Knight, 10. Christopher Bradley, 11. Johnny Ghisso, 13. Robert Gomez, 14. Leigh Gunn, 15. Peter Cklamovski, 16. Michael Hawrysiuk, 17. Jimmy Aschner,



Bonnyrigg coach Greg Woodhouse (centre) celebrates last season's Grand Final victory over Blacktown ...

18. John Kyriazopoulos, 20. David Aceski, 22. Rajko Mandic, 23.Devrim Huseyin

Coach: Greg Woodhouse

Players to watch: Tomasevic, Utjesenovic

Blacktown City Demons: 1. John Crawley, 2. Dane Hokin, 3. Damien Foxe, 4. Peter Sermanni, 5. Ben Willard, 6. Damon Langan, 7. Paul Dee, 8. Michael Smith, 9. Kain Rastall, 10. Naoki Imaya, 11. Jim Nikas, 12. Zlatko Donev, 13. Steve Riches, 14. David Reid, 16. Patrick Gatt, 17. Luciano Berbis, 18. Graeme O'Donell, 19. Chad Lewis, 20. James Wilkinson,

Coach: Brian Brown

Players to watch: Dee, Imaya

X-Factor: The White Eagles haven't lost a game this season, and the Demons are sure to be greeted with a hostile welcome from the Bonnyrigg faithful.

Prediction: Demons in a nail-biter.

IN other games this week St. George and Sutherland do battle in a clash that could well decide the wooden spoon.

Fairfield Bulls, one point outside the Top Five, host the Central Coast in a match that could determine their finals aspirations.

The Bankstown City Lions, coming off a hiding last week travel to Penrith, who go into the game after a hard-fought tussle at Belconnen. First plays third when Parramatta host the Belconnen side this week. The Blue-Devils are still to confirm themselves a finals berth and a win here could well set up the rest of their season. Leichhardt are at home to Canterbury Marrickville with the Tigers going about their business quietly and looking on target for a strong run leading into the finals.

NSW SUPER LEAGUE SPECIAL
PREVIEW 2002

THE 2002 NSW Super League kicks off this weekend, with 12 teams battling for premiership honours. SOCCER TODAY sussed out the teams and made some bold predictions that are sure to ruffle a few feathers. Manly-Warringah Dolphins will be desperate to defend their crown, while the likes of Rockdale and Fraser Park will be major contenders. Newly-promoted Sydney University will also have a point to prove.
SOCCER TODAY rated each team and caught up with the goss ...

1 rockdale city suns

ROCKDALE Suns will once again enter this season's competition as one of the favourites.

But don't tell that to new football manager and last year's coach of the year Bill Pilovski.

"We'll probably finish last or second last," he SAYS jokingly.

The down to earth former Dulwich Hill coach is in charge of looking over all the action on and off the pitch for the Rockdale sides and so far he likes what he sees.

"Things are coming along quite well at this stage and we should do well this season," he explains.

Mile Todoroski is continuing on from his role as head coach of the first grade squad this season, and will no doubt be looking to improve on a side that under-achieved last season.

In dealing with the tag as one of the competition's favourites, Pilovski takes it in his stride.

"If people want to say that we're favourites or that we're going to win it then there's not much we can do about that," he says.

"We don't see a problem with that, whatever label is thrown at us throughout the season, we'll just have to take it on and deal with it."

There are a few new faces in the Suns camp such as goalkeeper Peter Trajevski from Dulwich Hill, former Manly Warringah Dolphin Tony Ju, as well as the Alilivic brothers Tony and Dennis.

"We're happy with the squad we've got at the moment," Pilovski says.

"We might need another striker but we'll tackle that problem if and when we get to it.

"We'll be looking at strengthening our defence this season and not conceding as many goals.

"Individually we might not be as strong as last season but as a team we will go well."

2 manly-warringah dolphins

Defending Super League champions the Warringah Dolphins haven't had the ideal preparation in the lead-up to this weekend's season kick-off.

Despite the less than convincing start the Dolphins will still field one of the star-studded sides in the competition consisting of a number of former NSL players.

Guys such as experienced defender Steve Berry, Danny Townsend and inspirational leader Phil Moss, provide the core and the stability for a side that has plenty of pace and individual talent.

First-time coach former Aussie International Robbie Slater, takes over the reigns from Gary Van Egmond and is keen to taste what the action is like on the other side of the chalk.

"He's very keen and willing to learn," explains manager Dennis Jones.

"He's eager and all the players really like him, he's just a nice bloke and has no problem getting along with the guys."

Slater played in a few early trial games but a back injury is likely to keep the star-flanker sidelined for their opening match, and there is still doubt as to whether he will be a regular in the starting line-up throughout the season.

Nevertheless, his foray into coaching is sure to be well observed. There are even rumours that friend and fellow former Socceroo Graham Arnold will be making a few surprise appearances for the Dolphins this season.

With a growing injury list, the Dolphins may very well look to the former goal-scoring ace for assistance up front.

"We've had a few injuries to main players and we will struggle to get them on the park by the weekend," Jones says.

"It will take a few weeks before we get settled but once we do we should do well." "We'll be looking to successfully defend our title

this season but there are plenty of other good sides, so it won't be easy."

3 fraser park jets

New Fraser Park coach John Sentas has dismissed suggestions that his side are one of the favourites to take out the Super League competition this year.

"I wouldn't consider us favourites at this stage," the former St.George coach admits.

"I'd definitely like to think that we're firm finals contenders though.

"You have to remember that we have only three players remaining from our first grade squad of 36 last season.

"We've pretty much had to rebuild the squad from scratch which takes some time."

The Jets have spared no expense in becoming a more professional club this season, keeping with their goal of one day making it to the Premier League.

"We've taken a more professional approach this season," Sentas says.

"The facilities here are first class, and the committee is always looking at ways to improve the club."

Big things were also expected from the Jets last season and with the personnel they had on board by rights they should've finished further up the ladder.

Fraser Park's reputation goes on the line this season, and no doubt they are looking to stand and deliver on the promise shown.

"With the new squad we've kept it small purposely because we still haven't found out what we want," Sentas explains.

"Last year we had mercenaries come in here and then leave.

"We want players that are going to stay with the club and that we can build around."

"If that means using our youth players in the early rounds than that what's we'll do, because we're not going to go out there and buy players who won't stick around."

Sentas has brought with him his own coaching staff and although the side will take time to come together the signs are there.

Exciting midfielders Paul Candelori and Rui Silva have stayed on at the club and have been aided by the signatures of impressive players such as Matthew Percy, Daniel Borg and Tony Faria.

4 macarthur rams

MACARTHUR Rams are looking to put behind the disappointment of last season as they focus on the upcoming Super League competition.

Last season the Rams first grade side performed well below what was usually expected from the traditionally strong Macarthur side.

Injuries at the wrong time combined to upset the Rams rhythm and it was a season that never really got started for them.

This season, so far things are coming along much more smoothly, with the Rams going undefeated in their three friendly matches.

Their preparation has been the biggest highlight for coach Hugh McCrory as he aims to get the Rams back to the top of the league.

"The only different thing this year is that we're better prepared," he says.

"Last year we had to totally rebuild the side and this year we've had to do the same thing, so it's been hard work.

"We're still going through a transistional stage and building on what we have at the club."

Rather than just concentrate solely on the performances of the first grade side, the Rams unlike other clubs are focused on performing at all levels throughout

Last year their 18s and 21s performed admirably both reaching the Grand Final, and similar success is expected this season.

"Our aim for the year is for us to finish in the Top Five and have our youth league sides promoted to the Super Youth League," McCrory explains.

"Last year wasn't disappointing, we finished seventh and our two younger sides made the Grand Final."

Without ever being the flashiest of sides the Rams have always prided themselves on being one of the hardest working, and that won't change this season.

"We're going to be one of the hardest working sides, and what I'm looking for is a good solid all-round performance," McCrory says.

"I'm not looking for any special individual performances more of just having the side work well together as a unit."

5 stanmore hawks

ONE of this season's dark horses could well be the Stanmore Hawks.

If pre-season form is anything to go by then the Hawks would head into the start of this week's competition ranked as the number one side in the league.

Finishing 11th last season is not something that sat well with the ambitious club, and they have taken steps to ensure they finish much higher this season.

The Hawks have signed some experienced players in Eric Hristodoulou, Tom Pontidas, George Kalegeros, Robert Todoroski to name but a few.

They are currently negotiating with last season's star Eddie Briscoe and combined with an exciting blend of young talent the Hawks are sure to be an exciting team to watch this season.

New coach Chris Karatzis admits that the addition of a strong, skillful and experienced core of players will have an immediate influence.

"The movement off the ball is excellent and these players know how to play the game," he says.

"We should be scoring a lot goals this season, not only up front but through midfield. The football will be a lot more fluid and attractive to watch.

"I'd be disappointed if we finished below fifth spot."

In his first year at the Hawks, Karatzis confirms that there has been no pressure to perform a miracle turn-around in just one year.

"I'm in a good position where they haven't put any pressure on me to win the league and they'd be happy with a mid-table finish," confirms Karatzis.

"But I think we're a better team then that, and with the veterans are already starting to rub off on the younger players.

"At training the older guys are telling the younger ones where to run, what to do and the boys are just loving it.

"These guys are winners and know how to win that's why we've brought them."

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6 ac united

AN impressive feature of last season's Super League competition was the performance of some of the first-timers into the competition.

AC United performed admirable under trying conditions and against stronger and more experienced opponents.

Following on from last season, where the south-west side just finished short of a finals berth, United are looking to take that next step this season.

"We've lost a few players such as Melisourgos and Grubba, but we will have Alan Picken back when he's finished at Leichhardt, and we've still got the basis of last year's squad," coach Paul Carter explains.

"I'm fairly happy with the way things are, but going into the first game I don't think we would've settled on our full squad.

"Still having said that our preparation is still a lot better then what it was going into last season's competition."

There certainly is a pressure to perform for United this season though, and it's a pressure to get results that differs from what was expected in the past.

"I think it's good for the club to have that type of pressure, I'm happy with that," confirms Carter.

"I'm pretty confident that we'll do well even though we've gone through a few changes.

"I'd be disappointed if we didn't make the finals."

Carter also pinpoints the return of Ben Price to the side after missing most of last season with a hand injury as a player to keep an eye on and concedes there could be a few more "big surprise" signings.

"I think Ben Price will really take the competition by storm this season," he says.

"We've also got a few surprises in store as well.

"I think you'll see a much tighter competition this year, it will be a lot more even.

"Even teams that didn't do as well last season like MSC will give sides a lot tougher run."

7 dulwich hill

LAST year's over-achievers Dulwich Hill will be looking to follow on from their heroics from last season, with another surprise showing this year.

A face-lift during the off-season sees Dulwich Hill field pretty much a new side this season, that will no

doubt take time to settle.

"It's always hard to build a brand new team," explains club secretary John Ferreira "But Dulwich Hill are Dulwich Hill and we never say die.

We've got new players and things are looking fairly well but it will take time."

New coach Rudy Gomez takes over from Bill Pilovski who has moved down the road to local rivals Rockdale.

A move that is sure to make their already gripping contests even more heated than usual this season.

"Yeah you could say that the games between Rockdale and Fraser Park are games that we have highlighted this season," admits Ferreira.

"The rivalry has always been there and the local derbies are always good matches."

It will be hard for Dulwich Hill to live up to their performances of last season, and this year teams are

sure not to be taking them lightly.

Making this season even more daunting then last, the Dulwich Hill side may lack the experience and skill of players such as George Kalogeros and Matthew *Dihm, but*

like their predecessors will more than make up for it with commitment and desire to succeed.

They're not playing up their chances of taking out the league but the Dulwich Hill side are quietly confident of doing well.

"At the start we thought we'd be happy finishing mid-table or just making the finals," Ferreira says.

"But looking at us now were looking at doing better and challenging for the title."

8 hajduk wanderers

NOBODY really knew what to expect from the Hajduk Wanderers last season.

On their day they were capable of matching it with the league's heavyweights and at other times they would go down to the lesser lights.

This season new coach Tom McCulloch is concentrating on rectifying their consistency with the former Marconi star explaining how he has settled in his new role.

"Firstly it's just a good club that is very well run, so that has made it a lot easier," he says.

"A lot of work has been done both on and off the pitch for the up-coming season.

"We had our first few practice matches in September and the side has certainly come a long way since then."

The Hajduk side is fairly much unchanged from last season, with the experiences of last season looking to serve as one of the most contributing factors to their success this season.

"I think their biggest problem last season was just consistency," McCulloch says.

"We could beat the bigger teams then come out the next week and lose to a lower side.

"I think the side underachieved last season, and whatever the reason is I'm not too sure but they should've finished better."

Injuries did play a large hand in the fate of the Wanderers last season, but with the side looking fully fit, there are no excuses heading into the first round.

Hajduk concluded their preparations with hit-outs against AC United and Marconi, and a finals berth certainly doesn't look beyond them.

"I'd be disappointed if we didn't make the finals," McCulloch says

"We don't want to finish where we did last season and I'd be surprised if at least three or four of the boys didn't come out and have bigger and better seasons."

The Wanderers first-round match looks to be a test on how far the side has come when they take on league favourites the Fraser Park Jets.

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NSW SUPER LEAGUE SPECIAL
PREVIEW 2002

9 ryde city

ITS been some time between drinks but Ryde City are back in the Super League and looking to make up for lost time when they take on MSC Liverpool in their first game back in the top flight on Sunday.

Led by coach Tony Dunn and assistant, former Ryde City Captain Chris Crowley the Gunners are looking to cement themselves in this competition for years to come.

"The club's been there before and I think their promotion is a just reward for all the effort they have put in," says Dunn.

"We started pre-season training in November and have signed about ten new players.

"The new guys we've brought in as well as the younger guys we have in the team have brought in a lot of enthusiasm and combined with the experienced players we've got, we have a good mix.

"We're all just excited and looking forward to the season starting."

Dunn explains that the side won't be taking any unnecessary risks this season, preferring to pressure teams on the counter, with defence being their number one concern.

"The secret to success with any promoted club is not to concede goals," he says. "If we can concede the least amount of goals, I think that our fitness is on par with any other side in the competiton."

The Gunners were impressive in their trial match against Premier League side the Leichhardt Tigers, going down 2-1 to a side coached by one of Ryde City's favourite son's and life member Les DeCelis.

"It feels really good to be back," explains assistant coach Chris Crowley. We're more than confident that we can hold our own and we'll feel our way through the start of the season and get better as we go along."

Crowley highlights players Andrew Stratford, Cormack Begley and Scott Dixon as ones to keep an eye out for this season.

10 hurstville city

Like plenty of teams in the Super League, the Hurstville City Crescent Star underwent heavy development in the off-season.

Last season the Hurstville City Minotaurs competed in the Winter competition and finished in the bottom half of the table.

Following on from last year the Hurstville club merged with Turkish-based third division side Sydney Crescent Star who won the third division league last season.

The two ambitious clubs have joined forces and are confident of a strong showing in this season's competition.

"We (Hurstville City Minotaurs) just missed out on the finals last season," explains football manager Peter Sarikakis.

"The merger hasn't been easy but the executive committee have all worked well together and I think we've done a good job in bringing in the right peoplefor the job."

The Hurstville have certainly looked focused on the pitch so far this season, and with a squad of 20 players with possibly more to come, nothing less than a finals berth will satisfy.

"Our aim is to win the Premiership," Sarikakis says.

"At the very least we want to make the finals and if we don't do that then we will be very disappointed.

"We have a good coaching staff, the majority of the players from last year's Hurstville side, some very good players from Sydney Crescent Star and are looking to sign two or three more players with Premier league or NSL experience."

The club will play out of St.George Stadium this season and financially at least, the club is looking much more secure than in past seasons.

"The financial situation is a lot better," confirms Sarikakis.

"We're now in the position we're we can hang onto our good players and also attract high-profile players to the club."

11 msc liverpool

MSC Liverpool will be pushing hard for a Top-Five spot this season, according to coach Brian Dene.

"Our goal is to reach the Top-Five in all three grades," confirms the MSC coach.

"Last year our 18s were our best performed side and they're looking even better this year, and our 21s will be much improved also."

But most of the attention will centre on the performances of the first-grade side who received plenty of attention last season, most of it for the wrong reasons.

Finishing last by a considerable margin last season, there were suggestions that the Moorebank-based side didn't have what it takes to compete at this level.

Dene and his troops are looking to put to rest these thoughts with a strong showing this season that will silence their critics.

Their pre-season work has been solid and with a fairly new-look squad MSC are showing signs of promise.

"We've had games against Rockdale, AC United and Bathurst in Bathurst," Dene says.

"We went down 4-1 to Rockdale, but Rockdale at Rockdale, but we did beat Bathurst away which was a good victory.

"There has definitely been a step-up in the level of professionalism and I think that we now have the right people in the right places."

Remaining from last season is Scott Watkins and Peter Moon, the return of Robert Cicek from Sweden is also a big boost.

He joins new signings from Bankstown Robert and George Issa with the pair giving the MSC side a lot more depth when it comes to attacking options.

"I think George and Robert will have big seasons,"

Dene admits.

"Things are looking pretty good at this stage.

"Generally the mood at the club is very good and extremely positive for the season ahead."

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THE FINAL WHISTLE!

Grass Roots football is a very important part of the game

AS you may have noticed, this issue is full of grass roots material thanks mainly to our bumper preview of the New South Wales Super League, which kicks off this weekend.

Apologies to those of you who in recent weeks have become accustomed to overseas material and apologies to those of you who enjoy the history pages and our extended coverage of the National League.

They will be back next week.

So why, you ask, would we bother giving so much time and ink to a competition that is essentially a second-tier state league?

Why, when our coverage of the NSW Premier League - the first-tier of football in this state - is admittedly limited.

Purely because this publication is one of few mediums whereby the little guy can not only be seen, but it is also an area where he or she can be heard.

Super League may not be an appropriate name for such a competition but regardlesss of that, it is important.

The clubs take it very seriously and many pay their players considerable sums of money to wear the team shirt.

In a nutshell, we believe that coverage of the grass roots game is important - that's why the decision was made to give Super League a hearty welcome to 2002.

Readers can look forward to expanded coverage of the various youth leagues in NSW as well as a few more stories from interstate.

The major youth leagues kicked off in NSW last weekend and it's amazing to think that there are some 168 teams, from 11s to 17s, competing every weekend in two competitions - the Premier Youth League and the Super Youth League.

That's not to mention the hundreds of youngsters running around in the current NSW Premier League Under 19s and the NSL Youth competition.

It's an endless stream of quality football.

Amateurs start soon too and again, we will be providing as much coverage as possible to satisfy your appetite for the game. Until next week,

Your in soccer,
Derek Royal (Publisher)

NSW SUPER LEAGUE SPECIAL PREVIEW 2002

12 sydney university

Sydney University won't be changing much when it comes to their first game in the Super League this season.

It will be a historical and memorable first match for the students but coach Stewart Porter and his troops will be sticking with what has got them this far.

"It's going to be difficult but we're going to be keeping with what we did last season and keeping it simple," he says.

"It's our closeness and ability to work together as a unit that has built our success so far and that won't change."

Indeed, it has been the simple things that have worked well for Uni and they certainly won't be the flashiest side in the competition.

They are renowned for their discipline and ability to run all day.

That's not to say they can't score goals, as in leading striker Rob Smithies they possess one of the most clinical finishers in the competition.

If enthusiasm is anything to go by then University should have no problem competing at this level, with Porter admitting that his side are keen to get out there and prove what they can do.

They will face a stern first up test when they come up against one of the league's big guns in the Rockdale Suns.

A match that holders extra significance for coach Porter.

"I spent five years there, so it means a lot to me," he confesses.

"It's a game that promises to be a good match to see where we stand."

Rockdale rival, football manager Bill Pilovski echoes Porter's sentiments on the perennial Super League heavyweights against the league's new boys.

"Yeah we'll be going up against our old mate Stewart Porter," Pilovski says

"It will be a tough game and they'll be keen to do well, so we'll have to be on our game."

THE WOMEN'S GAME

Proudly brought to you by SOCCER TODAY

Michelle attended the renowned sporting nursery Westfield Sports High School. But she didn't play sport, she was there to study and to dance. Soccer Today caught up with her ...

Words: Derek Royal
Pictures: Tina Asprea

MICHELLE is a university student and with the career path she's pursuing she'll be studying for most of the rest of her life.

The pretty 18-year-old is in her first year of a combined Law and Communications degree, a qualification she hopes will prepare her for a corporate career in public relations.

Now into her second year as a cheerleader, Michelle says she wants to continue performing for as long as she can. In fact, despite a demanding university *schedule, she has no immediate* intentions of giving it away.

"I'm still only young," she said.

"And I still really enjoy the dancing and promotional work."

Michelle decided to audition for the Mermaids, the Cronulla Sharks' rugby league cheer squad two years ago "because they had a good reputation and it was something to do."

Not that she had too much idle time on her hands, what with dance and study commitments at Sydney's Westfield Sports High School.

Michelle graduated from Westfields last year and while she scored enough marks to enter the hallowed halls of Law, she swears that her life wasn't just all work and no play.

"I didn't study too much during the year and nothing got in the way of the social life," she says.

"I did my study before assessments and crammed in at the end when the exams came along."

Michelle's year at Westfields was the first to enter the school's dance program and she says the school is now reaping the rewards.

"We were the first to go through and the program has developed since then," she says.

"They've got some great dancers now and they also do the cheerleading for (National league club) Parramatta Power, which is really good." Michelle says that she started dancing when she was three-years-old and has never looked back - she loves it that much.

She has also won several gongs and awards for excellence in dance and has received scholarships in jazz and tap in three states - NSW, Victoria and Queensland. Like most people involved in this type of work, Michelle is often involved in promotions and she's not too fussed whether they be at shopping centres, function centres or even Fox Studios. Last year she entered cheerleader of the year and got to the finals in Canberra, while she has also been selected to perform at the Opera House as one of last year's best High School performers. But in the meantime and for the forseeable future, she's quite content to be performing for the crowds at Toyota Park and enjoying the camaraderie that comes with being a part of such a professional, tight-knit unit.

"I've met lots of people, made lots of friends and all the girls in the squad are really nice. Hopefully I can continue dancing here and there because I'm still only young and I figure I can still do this for many years to come."

Indeed, some would say that Michelle has it all - looks, intelligence and a well-balanced lifestyle. Plus of course, a penchant to be social ...

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